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Everybody's

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VEMBER 1924

25¢

New Detective Story at Last

E DOCTOR DISAGREES

By Robert A. Simon

Also A Complete Novel

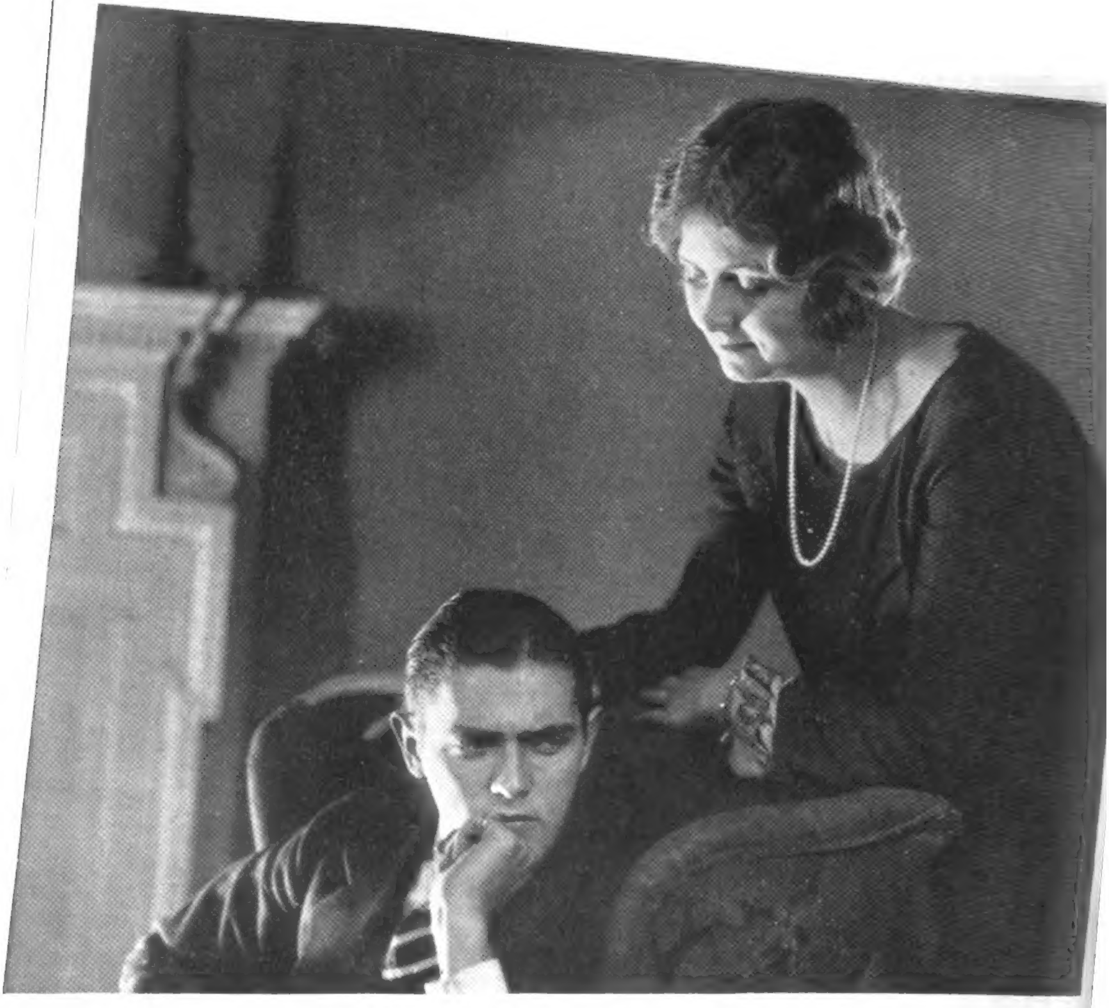
By Hugh Randolph

A Novelette

By Octavus Roy Cohen

Arthur Mills
Sam Carson
Jonathan Brooks
Margery Williams
Francis Brett Young

and Others



The great disappointment of her life

HER SON—the boy she had hoped everything for! And yet every position he had held since leaving college proved only a stepping-stone into a new failure.

He was her wandering boy—wandering hopelessly from one job into another. But still she loved him.

But like so many mothers she was totally blind to the real reason back of her son's disappointments. Or if she did know, she didn't have the heart to tell him.

* * * * *

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This safe and long-trusted antiseptic has dozens of different uses: note the little circular that comes with every bottle. Your druggist sells Listerine in the original brown package only—three sizes: three ounce, seven ounce and fourteen ounce. Buy the large size for economy.—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

For HALITOSIS
use LISTERINE

Everybody's

NUMBER FIVE NOVEMBER, 1924 VOLUME FIFTY-ONE

If It's in Everybody's It's a Good Story

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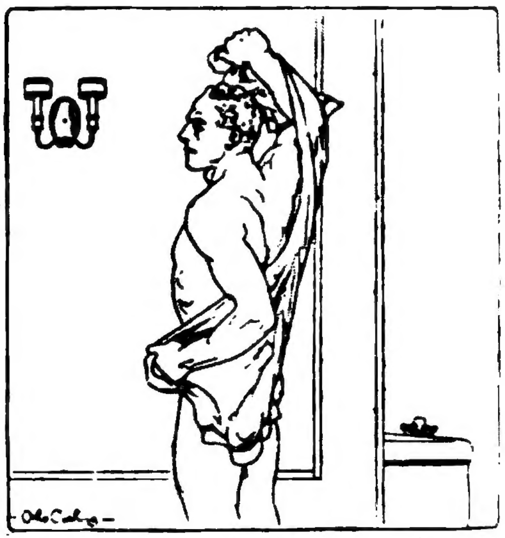

MEMORANDUM

In re:
The matutinal pluvial ablution

Sir:

As you know, the use of Ivory Soap for the morning shower-bath, as well as for other toilet purposes, is, among well-regulated homes, almost universal.

But, for your information, a home is sometimes found whose occupants are, for one reason or another, denied this Ivory luxury, with somewhat the following results:

1. **Even a prolonged and acrimonious agitation of the soap at hand produces only a poverty-stricken second cousin to real lather;**
2. **The user often feels the need of a high-pressure fire-hose to remove the last trace of oleaginous film;**
3. **The inhalation of pungent soap perfumes frequently unsteadies the hand that signs the checks.**

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1. **Ivory Soap clothes the delighted shower-bather from head to foot in pure, rich lather, before a magician could pull a brace of rabbits from a silk hat.**
2. **Ivory lather rinses with the ease and promptness of a ten-dollar bill departing from your wallet in a Broadway restaurant.**
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PROCTER & GAMBLE

P. S.

Guest Ivory is the new cake of Ivory, made especially for face and hands. Its size, shape and gentleness qualify it as a man's soap which women use with enthusiasm, and entirely vice versa.

IVORY SOAP

99 44/100% PURE IT FLOATS

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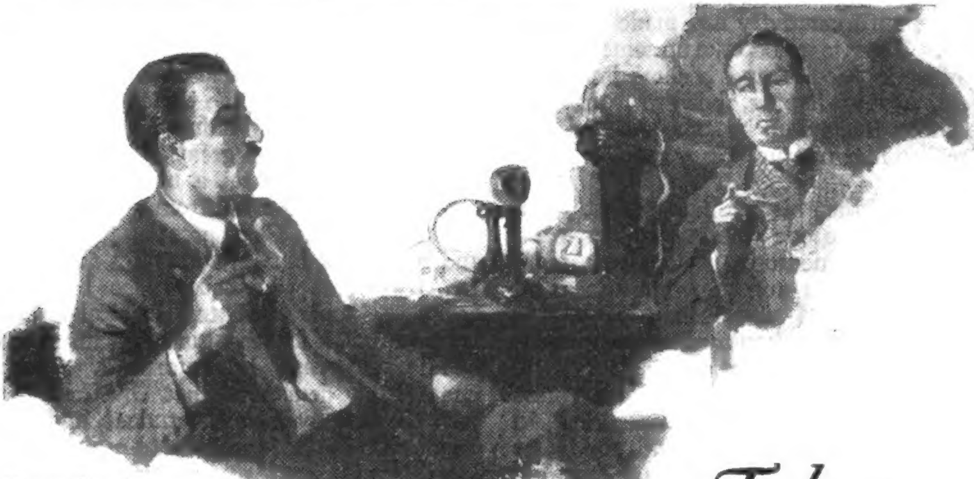
VOL. 51, NO. 5 NOVEMBER, 1924 SEWELL HAGGARD, EDITOR



Illustrations by
J. M. Clement

The Doctor Disagrees

Mr. Simon in His First Attempt for Everybody's Has Written a Serial That Is Really Off the Beaten Track. He Has Found a Novel Way of Starting and Working Out a Mystery Romance—a New Use *for Detective Stories*

By Robert A. Simon

DR. HUGH FARRIGAN hadn't enjoyed the sight of a broken leg for at least three weeks. He was a frustrated orthopedist, although you might not have thought so, for he looked imposing in his little office on Ninety-fourth Street near Broadway. Patients, when there were any, were impressed with his steadiness. Sitting behind his glass-topped table, toying with a paper cutter in the form of a fancifully permuted scalpel, he radiated power. His eyes invariably were described as steely by lady visitors who used words like steely, and his hands were spoken of as capable. Mrs. Bauerndorf, who lived in the apartment across the hall, thought that he was a fine, clean-cut young man, in fact, the sort of doctor you would let your daughter visit, unaccompanied. Mrs. Bauerndorf had no daughter.

Dr. Farrigan, making a cursory investigation of the drizzle against his windowpane, sighed. These warm May evenings were becoming monotonous. Somebody

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had suggested to him that it would be a clever move to have office hours between seven and nine, and he was testing the idea. But apparently this two-hour period was not one of high disease frequency. On many evenings he had sat at his table, waiting until inactivity had made him irritable. Then he would take up some volume of Materia Medica and become immersed in it, always hoping, however, that he would be dredged up by some sufferer from a really fine fracture or a good, healthy break.

Now and then his reading was disturbed, either by some one who had a new work on abdominal neuroses to vend, or, more rarely, by some woman from a near-by flat, whose child was feeling something awful after eating frankfurters and marshmallow sundaes, and who didn't like to bother her regular doctor with these little things. There was something to be said for croup, colds and colic, but didn't anybody ever have an interesting ailment?

As he looked up from Materia Medica to the window, he became aware of a senescent player-piano thumping out the antiquated refrain of "Chinatown, My Chinatown." Dr. Farrigan could remember this air as the real harbinger of spring for several years past. As soon as the temperature opened the windows of the "walk-up" apartments back of his office, "Chinatown, My Chinatown" flew blithely out. It was three years now that he had inhabited this office—three years as relentlessly static as the unknown neighbor's love for the eulogy of Chinatown.

Materia Medica was absorbing enough, but it offered only vicarious experience. If only some strange disease, lodged in an alien body, would come marching into the consultation room! He wished that he could believe in the psychic philosophy that one could have anything if only one desired it with sufficient fervor. It was a night for something to materialize, if things ever did materialize. The drizzle had trickled off into a thick mist which threw the lights in the windows across the court out of focus. The streets were a blur of things. Perhaps from this haze something could come to him, something tangible and exciting, yet something surrounded with the fanciful aura of the unknown.

HE REMEMBERED the thrill that came the first time that he had treated Leed Payne. Payne was a banker, mentioned occasionally in the newspapers as the mystery man of Wall Street. To his physicians, Payne was a powerful, short-tempered, middle-aged bachelor, who believed in everything in which he believed, at first sight. He had severed relations with Dr. Unstrand, one of the three great orthopedists, because he didn't like Dr. Unstrand's eyes. The great specialist had been summoned to set a broken shoulder blade, incurred in a fall from a notoriously expensive horse. The operation was simple and successful, but Payne took a dislike to Dr. Unstrand, who sensed the banker's antipathy and intimated ironically but politely that a former student of his could handle the case thenceforward. Payne immediately demanded that Dr. Unstrand turn the case over to the student, and Dr. Farrigan became surgeon extraordinary to Leed Payne.

"There's nothing to do but look him over every week," Dr. Unstrand had told Hugh, "but hurt him a little when you do it or he'll think you don't know your business. And if you don't send in a good big bill, he'll be convinced that you don't. If he happens to like you at first sight, he'll be a lifetime patient. If he doesn't, out you go. He's a man who works entirely on his prejudices."

Payne's prejudices seemed to be in Hugh's favor, and he sent for him frequently. Payne suffered little from his broken bones, but he felt that he had to be kept in condition.

"It's your business," he informed Hugh, in his brisk, rasping voice, "to keep me up to scratch. Most of the time I feel rotten. See that I don't. That's all."

Payne's "That's all" was one of the few familiar characteristics of the man. It was a masterpiece of literalism. It was a command which could not be questioned and which could not be disobeyed without a drastic penalty. So far, Hugh reflected, he had followed Payne's behest. Payne had immense vitality. He subjected his system to strains which might have injured any other man and escaped with nothing worse than a bad frame of mind. Hugh's principal function was to cater to the banker's restlessness. The doctor gave no orders; it was the patient who prescribed.

"I feel rotten," he would say. "Get me a couple of good seats for a show tonight and come with me."

"Come with me on a party tonight," was another formula. "Be at my house at nine. That's all."

And those parties!

Then the bell jangled. Hugh looked up from his reverie. Perhaps the adventure had come out of the mists. He opened the door to admit a young man in evening clothes and a soft hat. The young man was slightly above medium height, with dark brown hair carefully plastered down, sharp but troubled brown eyes, a good jaw and a pleasant but unsteady smile.

"Dr. Farrigan?" he asked in a low voice, not altogether under control.

Hugh recognized it as the voice of a patient who had decided to consult a physician only after a hard internal conflict.

"I'm Dr. Farrigan," he said. "Won't you come in?"

The young man followed him into the consulting room and sat in the heavily upholstered chair near the desk.

"I'll take your history first, if you don't mind," Hugh said. "Name?"

"Wrome. W-r-o-m-e," said the young man. "James Wrome. I live across the street. I was going to a dinner tonight but—"

"Just a minute," interrupted Hugh. "Let me take down the rest of the data. Business?"

"I'm with the Universal Sugar Refining Company. I'm assistant to the head of the refined-sugar department."

"Your age?"

"Twenty-nine."

Hugh shoved the card to one side. He had to let this chap talk. He seemed to be a patient who would find relief in an opportunity to discuss his symptoms.

"IT'S this way, doctor," said Wrome, speaking rapidly, as seemed to be his wont. "I was going out to a dinner tonight. Well, just as I was about to phone for a taxi, I felt weak and sick. Wrong all over. I never felt that way before. I couldn't understand it. So I thought it was something I'd eaten, and I took a pill and lay down. As soon as I lay down I began to tremble all over. I never had that before, either. In fact, I've always been in pretty good health.

" 'Well,' I said to myself, 'this won't do.' So I went back to the phone, but as soon as I touched the receiver, I began to get nervous and sick again. I thought it was foolish of me. Here I had a little touch of indigestion and suddenly I was all unnerved. But my tongue went dry and I felt all in, and when I tried to lie down, I began to tremble again. I can't think of what I could have eaten—"

"Maybe it has nothing to do with what you've eaten," interrupted Hugh, sharply.

Wrome seemed to be a little frightened by the suggestion.

"I can't think what else—"

"Let me ask you a few questions," said Hugh. "But first I think I'll look you over."

A rapid physical examination revealed no unusual conditions.

"I thought there wasn't much wrong," commented Hugh. "Have you been working hard lately?"

"No harder than usual. It isn't a very hard job. Raw sugar is, but not refined. Refined almost runs itself."

"Do you get enough exercise?"

"An hour or so of tennis a day. Sometimes a little golf. I keep in pretty good trim."

Hugh looked at him.

"Have you had anything disturbing happen to you lately?" he asked slowly.

Wrome fidgeted.

"Well—nothing that could have anything to do—"

"How do you know it couldn't have anything to do with your condition?" demanded Hugh.

"I don't," confessed Wrome.

He rubbed his hands against the glass-topped table.

"I might as well tell you, doctor," he said finally. "Maybe it'll do me good to get it out of my system. There isn't anybody I can talk to about it. Only, it'll sound terribly foolish to you, I'm afraid."

A deprecating smile helped to compose Wrome's somewhat overwrought features.

"Go ahead," Hugh suggested. "I'll light my pipe and listen."

Wrome changed his position in the chair several times before he began to speak.

"About three months ago," he began, "I met a girl—a young lady—"

"I thought so," Hugh emitted between puffs.

Wrome smiled at him as though pleased at the physician's sympathetic understanding.

"I'll tell you the whole story," Wrome said. "She was a lovely thing. We'll call her—well, I might as well use her name because it probably wouldn't mean much to you and it wouldn't matter if it did. Her name's Claire Barton. Claire isn't like any other girl I've ever known. That sounds like old stuff. I guess the real thing always sounds like old stuff. She's beautiful and clever and really unusual in every way. I mean she has brains and a heart—at least, I thought she had a heart.

"I MET her at some little affair—and it happened. I never thought I'd fall for anybody. I have a little apartment across the street, and I thought I'd probably spend all my life there. I've known plenty of attractive girls, but none of them ever really got me. Claire did.

"She asked me to call on her. I didn't see much of her family, but she lives with them in an inexpensive apartment. Very simply, you know. She's very natural and hasn't any affectations."

The thought of Claire seemed to impede Wrome's flow of speech. He looked at Hugh, who was nodding his head silently, and continued.

"She has a job downtown as secretary to some broker, and as she's working in my district, we used to go out to lunch together. In fact, it became a pretty common thing. I thought some day we'd be more than just friends. I suppose every man has an ideal girl somewhere in the back of his head, and Claire was the one that I must have had there.

"Claire and I used to see a good deal of each other. We went to shows together, and out dancing and all that sort of thing. We'd never discussed marriage or anything like that, but I felt that she understood. It's a hard thing to explain, but maybe you get the idea. As far as I knew, she wasn't interested in anybody else, and she must have known how I felt."

"So I began building air castles. I could see us married, with a home, and all that. I regarded her as my fiancée, although I don't suppose I had any right to. Well, last week, I had a date with her for lunch and she didn't turn up—the first time that had happened. I rang up and she said she couldn't speak to me then. The next morning I had a note from her."

Wrome's voice became dry and he articulated the rest with difficulty.

"She said we mustn't see each other any more, that it was no fault of mine, but that it would be best if I forgot her."

Wrome paused and stared at the desk.

"That was a knock-out, all right," he went on, forcing a smile. "I couldn't think of anything but Claire for several days. Then I couldn't stand it any longer. I rang her up, and again she said that she couldn't talk to me. I wrote to her and had no answer. I realized that I was making a fool of myself, and yet I couldn't think of anything I'd done that could induce her to break off everything that way.

"And that wasn't all. I felt that I had to see her, so I hung around her office building, waiting for her to come out. I knew that something had happened to her—I didn't have any idea what, but I wanted to find out. It was a situation I couldn't get at all, because she'd been particularly lovely the last time I'd seen her.

"Somehow, I always missed her. Perhaps she wasn't working there any more. But this noon—"

Wrome's speech slowed up.

"This noon I saw her at last. She came out of the building. Of course there was a crowd coming out about that time, so she didn't see me at once. I was about to go to her, when a fellow I know slightly took her arm. He's a rather stupid young man. Works for some house in Wall Street. She smiled at Hesbe—his name's Blake Hesbe—and walked off with him, arm in arm, laughing and chatting with him as though—as though—"

Wrome again smiled his odd smile.

"This must sound pretty wild to you, doctor," he concluded.

"No," said Hugh, slowly. "It explains what's wrong with you. The affair's hit your nerves and impaired your digestion. You've been brooding over it and it's upset you. It's very common. I'm really an orthopedist, but such cases have interested me a good deal, and I've seen lots of them. You'll get over it."

"I hope so," said Wrome, "but I don't think so. Claire's before me all the time—Claire and that Hesbe, walking away arm in arm. Even now when I mention it—"

"Isn't there some other girl?" Hugh began.

"There can't be," Wrome declared. "I told you it was the only time I'd fallen. It's one of those things that happen only a few times in a century."

"It may happen oftener in the next quarter of a century," remarked Hugh. "You don't need medical attention. You need to know a few other girls—"

"I tell you, I know plenty of them but Claire's the only one—"

Hugh tapped the desk with his pipe.

"You'll have to get some sort of interest in life to keep your mind off the affair," he asserted. "Doesn't your business keep you occupied?"

Wrome laughed. "No. I'm sorry, but when I lock my desk at five o'clock, every granule of sugar passes out of my system."

Hugh folded his hands and looked idly at Materia Medica. He gazed at the bookcases in the room. Then he leaned across the desk and took a volume from a small collection held together by two skull-shaped book-ends.

"I'VE sometimes wondered whether a physician ought to indulge in experiments," he said, "but I m going to try one. It can't do any harm, and it may be the very thing. Tell me, Mr. Wrome, do you read detective stories?"

Wrome was puzzled. Physicians had asked him about his habits, his diet, his family, his sleep, and all manner of personal matters, but this was a new query.

"I've read them, of course," he admitted. "I'm not especially interested in them, and I haven't read any of them lately; but I've read them."

Hugh began to scribble on a prescription pad.

"I'm giving you a strange prescription," he observed. "It's probably the first time in history that a physician has written it, but it may be just what you need."

He passed a slip to Wrome.

Detective Stories.
Read one daily until relieved. Dose may be increased if desired.
HUGH FARRIGAN, M. D.

Everybody's Magazine, November, 1924

Wrome grinned. "Is this serious?" he demanded.

"Absolutely. I've found that a detective story is the best mental eliminant when the mind is clogged with unwholesome material. It'll be a mental excursion from which you'll return refreshed, even if you can't get there ahead of the detective."

"And when am I to start on this journey?" inquired Wrome.

"Tonight. I recommend the mental drug store known as Mecklin's, which you will find around the corner. The treatment won't be expensive, because you can rent the books at a quarter a week, and you won't keep them for more than a day or two. You'll find a very charming librarian in charge, and I think that she'll be able to keep you well supplied."

Hugh handed the book which he had taken from the rack to his patient.

"Here's your first dose," he explained. "'The Shower Bath Enigma.' I don't usually keep medicine in stock, but this happens to be here, and it ought to help you get a good night's sleep. Not over it, but because of it. By the time you figure out who killed the man in the gray sweater, you'll have forgotten all about your other troubles."

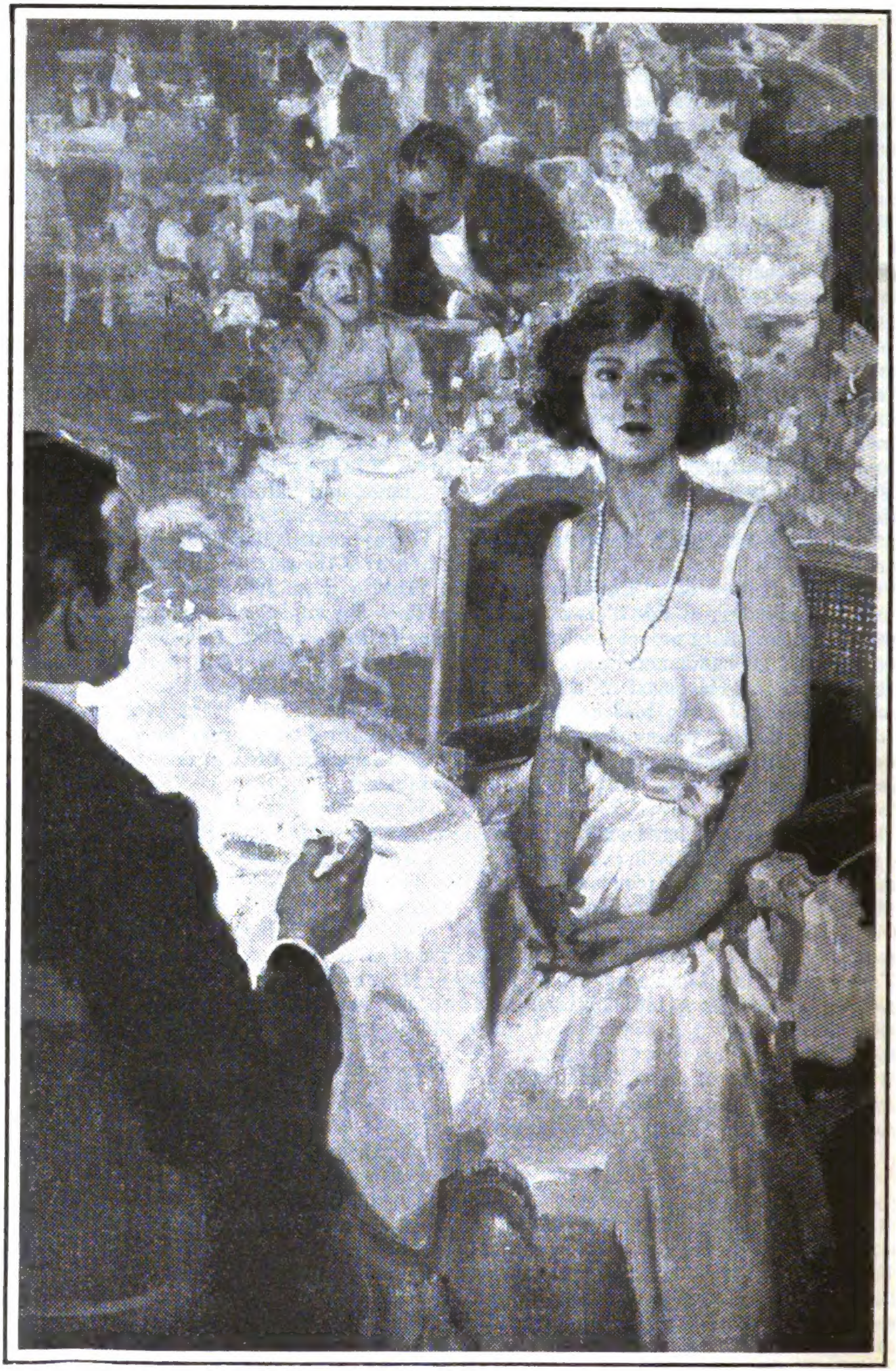
Wrome stood up and held the book in his hand as though weighing it.

"Well, doctor," he said, "I'll try it. If it helps me get over this feeling, I'll certainly—"

"Be surprised?" cut in Hugh. "I'll be surprised if it doesn't help you. Now, I want you to come back in a few days and tell me how you feel. But be sure you do as I've told you. And stick to it."

JIMMY usually walked directly from the subway to his apartment, but that evening, he strolled along Broadway, looking for Mecklin's. He felt a little like Bernard Gartlin, the Man of a Million Masks. He must become better acquainted with Gartlin, the suave old gentleman who always appeared on the scene after Scotland Yard or the United States Secret Service had relegated the case to the archives of the insoluble.

Mecklin's, he discovered, was an attractive little store, its window sparkling with books bearing labels announcing "renting price" and "sales price." He felt



From afar Jimmy saw Claire rise, resplendent, as her partner came toward her.

a little self-conscious about going in and asking for detective stories. Still, there were many detective-story addicts. It was time he got over this Claire nonsense, anyhow.

Seated behind a desk littered with index cards was a slender, dark-haired young woman, with cryptic but delightful olive eyes and a fascinating pout, put there by nature rather than by temperament. Jimmy felt reassured in the presence of the librarian. He smiled at her and drew Farrigan's prescription from his pocket.

"Do you think that you could fill this prescription for me?" he inquired.

She smiled back delightfully.

"I'd love to be a literary pharmacist," she said in a soft voice which, Jimmy thought, rippled. "Do you wish to become a subscriber?"

Jimmy filled out a blank and paid a deposit.

"Your physician doesn't specify the first treatment," she commented. "Have you any idea which book ought to be the first?"

"I'm sure you know more about them than I do," confessed Jimmy.

"Let's look at the chemicals," she suggested, "and I'll see if I can find a suitable liniment."

Liniment? Jimmy looked at her sharply. Farrigan had said that this was an uncommon treatment. The librarian spoke as though most broken hearts were cured by reading. But there was nothing knowing about her glances, and Jimmy charged his suspicions against his sensitivity.

"Try this one," she said, handing him a green book which seemed to have passed through many hands. "There's a great demand for it, but it just happens to be on the shelves today."

He inspected "The Porterhouse Murder."

A DISTURBING session at the clinic almost tempted Dr. Farrigan to toss the penciled memorandum on his desk into a waste basket already overflowing with complimentary blotters, but the word "Payne" on the sheet halted the dispatch of the note.

"Mr. Payne called up, wants you to come to his office right away."

Payne liked to summon people to his office. It sounded imposing, which was more than the office was. His mysterious transactions took place high up in a dingy gray building on Wall Street, a building which looked as if it had been patched together from the left-over materials of its more impressive neighbors. A dull gold legend, "Leed Payne," in the lower left-hand corner of coarsely ground glass, served as a guide to the passer-by.

Within was a tired-looking young woman who answered a telephone in a drab voice. A large door led into the sanctum of Payne, a bare room, concentrated entirely in a superannuated roll-top desk, from which the shellac had been rubbed many years ago. Payne had no chair in his office save that which he occupied. "People don't talk so long standing up," was his explanation.

"Mr. Payne was expecting you," drawled the secretary when Hugh arrived. "He wants you to wait a minute."

Hugh took an old cane chair facing the door, and looked about idly. A young woman in a neat blue serge suit entered on two of the loveliest ankles that Hugh ever had observed in a reasonably extensive and varied series of observations. From under an attractive little blue hat rolled a band of golden hair, and two blue eyes, bluer than the blue eyes usually associated with blondes, looked brightly but restlessly about. The coloring and the mouth completed the portrait appropriately. Hugh's gaze lost its idleness.

The door from Payne's office swung open creakily and the banker stepped to the threshold. His mezzo-forte gray checked suit, his pearl-gray spats, his brilliantly polished shoes, his blue and red striped necktie and the Gargantuan carnation in his coat lapel seemed quaintly out of place with the dull surroundings. He looked knowingly at his visitors, and smiled as only a man proud of his dentist can. When Payne was not looking knowingly, he was looking dully, and once in a while he looked fiercely. He was a man of three looks, light brown, dull brown and dark brown. Just now the prevailing tone color was light brown.

"Good afternoon, Dr. Farrigan," he remarked in a voice that always seemed a degree more raucous than necessary.

He stared curiously at the young woman.

"Ah!" he said sweetly.

He always prefaced his remarks to pretty women with "Ah!"

"Ah! Good afternoon, Miss Barton."

Hugh looked up sharply. Barton! Hadn't Wrome's girl been called Barton?

"You look as though you might know Miss Barton, doctor," commented Payne with a shrewd grimace. "If not, I'll introduce you. Miss Barton, may I present Dr. Hugh Farrigan? I hope that you'll excuse me for a few minutes longer. Then I'll see you for a moment, Miss Barton, and then I'll see you, Dr. Farrigan. I'm sorry that I haven't a more luxurious reception room for you."

He bowed himself back into his office jauntily. Evidently he was in one of his infrequent jocular moods today.

"You know me, Dr. Farrigan?" asked the young woman.

Hugh noted that the voice also fitted the picture, and that there was something vaguely anxious about the tone of it.

"I don't know," he answered. "I think I've heard of you."

This response failed to put Miss Barton at ease.

"Where?" she asked.

HUGH deliberated before answering. It wouldn't be professional ethics to discuss a patient, even so odd a patient as Jimmy Wrome, with a stranger. Yet Jimmy had mentioned Miss Barton socially rather than medically. Perhaps it would throw more light on Jimmy's trouble if Miss Barton could be led to speak of her relations with him.

"A friend of mine named Wrome knows a Miss Barton," he said. "Perhaps you're that Miss Barton."

Miss Barton acknowledged her identity by an uneasy movement of her captivating ankles.

"Yes," she admitted. "Are you a friend of his?"

"I know him slightly. And then, I believe, Mr. Hesbe knows you."

The reference to Hesbe manifestly annoyed Miss Barton.

"You seem to know quite a lot about me," she said lightly. "I wonder what you could have heard from Jimmy or Mr. Hesbe."

"Jimmy or Mr. Hesbe." That might be significant.

"Not a thing," answered Hugh.

"Now, that's hardly fair, Dr. Farrigan," she insisted, looking at him earnestly for all her playful speech. "You know that you've heard something, and it isn't right to arouse a woman's curiosity without satisfying it."

"Really, I haven't," said Hugh. "You won't take it amiss, however, if I add that I'd like to know more about you."

"My story is only one of the short and simple annals of the poor," said Claire, promptly. "I have a job, and—and that's about all there is to know. Did you think that I had a highly colorful history?"

Distress had changed to charm.

"I didn't think at all."

Claire, in moments of badinage, was rather bewitching. It wasn't so easy to talk to her in those moments. Hugh reflected that this young woman might well upset the equilibrium of Jimmy Wrome—or of almost any man. Her beauty survived a first inspection and became more entrancing on closer acquaintance.

"Very few of us think when Miss Barton is around."

Payne had opened his door slightly.

"Won't you come in now, Miss Barton, and prevent me from thinking?"

Hugh didn't like Payne's attitude toward Claire. He didn't see what she had to do in his office. But those who passed in and out of Payne's office always had puzzled Hugh. Payne frequently declared that variety was the spice of life, and that he liked variety in the people he saw. Payne's famous week-end parties invariably brought together a curious assortment of guests.

Claire's interview with Payne was brief. She walked rapidly out of the office within five minutes after she had entered, and it was evident that she was even more perturbed than when she came. As she left, Payne came out of the inner office and looked after her grimly. Hugh rose as Claire passed him, but she was out of sight before he even could bow. Sometimes these short and stormy interviews in Payne's room were audible in the antechamber, but Hugh had heard nothing of what passed. Oh, well! Payne's relations with people were beyond him.

A CURT grunt from the banker summoned Hugh into the sanctum. Payne slumped into his chair and looked up dully.

"I feel rotten," he announced.

That was like Payne. Periods of jocularity always were followed by this proclamation.

"Yes, rotten," he reiterated savagely.

"Shoulder?"

"That's for you to say," Payne snapped. "You're the doctor. If you think it's the shoulder, look at it."

Hugh examined it quickly.

"Mending nicely," he said. "Does it hurt much when I touch it."

"Yes—no—I don't know."

Payne tossed his head irritably as he spoke.

"Don't bother me about that damn' shoulder," he commanded. "Wait till I ask you about it."

Payne's testiness didn't worry Hugh. He was acclimated to Payne.

"I didn't get you down here to talk about shoulders, anyhow," added Payne. "Have a cigar."

He thrust a box of fifty-cent Havanas at Hugh.

"Don't take one if you don't feel like it," he went on. "I didn't get you down here to hem and haw about cigars, either. Listen, now."

"Listen, now" was the signal for the passing of the depressed period and the beginning of an aggressive one.

"I'm going to have a party this week-end," said Payne, "and I want you to be there. All right?"

Hugh nodded and selected a cigar.

"Good. Now, I've got a pretty good collection of folks invited. Know Gulvin? No? No reason why you should. Then you don't know his wife, either."

Payne hauled a cigar out of the box and lighted it with an automatic lighter.

"He's one of those political fellows. He was the boy politician of the Bronx or one of those places. He's in the State assembly. I put him there. Otherwise, he's harmless. His wife's older than he is. She's a crank on little theaters and she likes to have me subsidize them. The littler the theater, the better I like it."

Payne puffed at the window and stared as it as if waiting for the smoke to rebound before he continued.

"Then I'm giving Eddie Endle a repeat engagement. I told him I'd be glad to have him if he'd leave his saxophone at that Shuffle Inn dance hall of his. You'll like him anyhow. And then—"

Payne jabbed his cigar in Hugh's direction.

"You saw that sweet young woman?"

He laughed.

"You certainly saw her! Well, she's coming with a boy friend. And I want you to bring up a new face. Bring your whole practice, if you like. You try hard enough to turn the place into a sanitarium, as it is."

Payne smoked silently for a moment, and then his face furrowed over, indicating that a busy man mustn't waste time on social fripperies.

"Come out at the usual time," he said, "and bring somebody with you."

Hugh assented.

"That's all."

Payne puffed on his cigar as if to blow Hugh out of the office on a cloud of tobacco smoke.

"Good afternoon," remarked Hugh.

"Did you say something?" grunted Payne, sharply.

Jimmy, of course, would be the guest to invite for the week-end at Olean. He would come face to face with Claire—and with her companion, who, presumably, would be the painful Hesbe. It might excite Jimmy, however, to meet the source of his sorrows. Hugh pondered on the ethical consequences of the proposed invitation. Did he have a right to bring anguish to a pleasant young man, whose only fault was that his affection had outrun his effectiveness? And yet, might it not be the very thing to bring Jimmy to his senses?

"CHINATOWN, my Chinatown,
Where the lights are low . . ."

Spring's own player-piano was pumping its nocturnal message into Hugh's ears again. The bell rang. Hugh opened the door, and Jimmy Wrome, in a light gray summer suit and a straw hat with a bright band on it, entered breezily. Jimmy's appearance was sufficient to indicate that he was no longer the slightly neurotic young man in evening clothes who had shambled in a few nights ago.

"Hello, doctor!" Jimmy called out. "How are you? Don't ask me how I am, because that's your business, but how are you? Ready to lick your weight in wild-flowers?"

"Come in," suggested Hugh, "and tell me about it."

"That was a good job you did on that Italian woman's wrist," remarked Jimmy, as he sat down in the consultation room.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Hugh. "How did you know I attended to an Italian's woman's wrist?"

"I know more than that."

Jimmy lit a cigarette, and flipped the match accurately into an ash-tray.

"She lives out of town—somewhere beyond New Rochelle—Port Chester, at a guess. She must have taken a mean fall when she hurt that wrist."

"Look here," interrupted Hugh. "I'll admit that my last patient was an Italian woman from Port Chester and that she fractured her wrist in a fall. She was sent up from the Clinic, but how in hell do you know anything about it?"

"Elementary, my dear Dr. Watson, I mean Farrigan," rejoined Jimmy. "I'm surprised that you don't know how I happen to know. You're responsible not only for the case of the fractured wrist but for my knowledge of it."

"Had any more nervous trouble since I saw you last?" inquired Hugh.

"Not a bit. I'm cured. But about that wrist. To begin with, as I came out of the house, I saw this woman leaving your office. I took it that a woman leaving your office at this hour would be a patient. All right. I watched her as she walked down the street. She was murmuring some sort of benediction on you in Italian, and flexing her right wrist all the time. So you must have patched that wrist for her. Every time she moved the wrist, she stepped gingerly, from which I gather that she probably injured it when she slipped and fell, somewhere."

"I suppose that's all very good," conceded Hugh, "but where did you get the Port Chester idea? Did you stop her and ask?"

"I didn't have to. She had a time-table in her left hand, and she was trying to read it under a street lamp. I couldn't see it closely, but it was a small New York, New Haven and Hartford folder. The only folder of that size they issue includes the Port Chester schedules."

"It also includes Mount Vernon, Pelham, New Rochelle—" Hugh began caustically.

"So I've heard," agreed Jimmy. "But it wasn't raining in any of those places today. She obviously came from some place where it either was raining or threatening to rain this morning. Well, they had showers all the way down the line to New Rochelle this morning, as one of our best commuters insisted on telling me. I didn't think the information would have any value, at the time. But your patient happened to be wearing rubbers. And my guess is Port Chester, because there's an Italian colony out that way. Now, that that's over, I feel fine and your prescription certainly worked."

"It seems to have made a detective of you," commented Hugh.

"IF YOUR friend Bernard Gartlin was a detective, I'm one, too. It took him fourteen chapters to discover that Linderman was the man in the gray sweater. And eleven masks. Now, I can tell you without a mask that you've had a child with a sore throat in here some time within the past hour."

"Did you see the child coming out of the office with a tonsil from New Rochelle in its hand?" asked Hugh.

"Don't be facetious, doctor," countered Jimmy, smiling. "First of all, you've got that examining chair screwed up high. You've left a few tongue depressors, not yet wholly dry, on your desk. And there's a little stick, apparently soaked in argyrol, which was used in swabbing out the child's throat. But even Bernard Gartlin could have told you that."

"Is this the effect of my prescription?"

"Probably. It's one of the best prescriptions I ever got."

"And did you take it literally?"

"Sure. I read a book or two a day. After 'The Shower Bath Enigma,' there was 'The Porterhouse Murder,' 'What Happened in Rochester,' 'The Pumblewaite Legacy'—not so good, that one—'Eighteen Minutes Past Five,' 'The Face in the Dark,' 'The Rosenbaum Case,' 'The Cryptic Bride,' and 'The O'Reilly Affair.' I just drew another one for good measure—'The Statue of Liberty Tangle.' "

"And you don't feel any more effects from your emotional disturbance?"

"Not an effect. By the way, how long have you had that patient with the skin disease?"

"Is this another demonstration of your skill?"

"Yes, and a simple one. You have a set

of books on skin diseases in that bookcase. It looks as though some agent had inflicted them on you, for they're dusty. One is missing, and on your desk. You wouldn't read them out of curiosity, for that's not your specialty."

"You haven't anything to do this week-end, have you?" asked Hugh.

"Is that a deduction or a guess?"

"It's neither. I'm not trying to compete with you in the detective business. It's an invitation."

Jimmy nodded amiably.

There was no doubt about it, Hugh thought. Jimmy's sudden propensity for sleuthing would entertain Payne and probably would enliven the week-end. He would encounter Claire, but Claire seemed to be a disease of which he had been cured. And such a cure! The detective stories had acted as a too powerful counter-irritant, and Jimmy seemed to be obsessed with solving mysteries. Hugh wondered what Payne would say if Jimmy began making personal deductions from the bookcases at Olean. But there was no doubt about it. Jimmy ought to come to Bellechester.

"I want you to go to Bellechester with me," he explained. "I have a patient there named Payne, who likes to give week-end parties. That, by the way, isn't the trouble for which I'm treating him. He'll have various people there, politicians, saxophone players and other curios—and you'll probably enjoy it. You'll have a wonderful chance to practise your new art."

"Science," demurred Jimmy. "If you'd read as much about Bernard Gartlin, Hamilton Boone, Lord Hembury, Wilhelmine O'Conner and the rest of those detectives as I have, you'd know that nothing is left to chance. It's only the local or police detective who bungles. The transcendent detective—isn't that a beautiful description? I found it in one of the books—may seem to be wrong, but that's only because he's sharper than the official sleuth and the reader. If you remember 'The Pumblewaite Legacy—' "

"I don't," said Hugh. "But do you think you're a transcendental detective or whatever it is?"

Jimmy looked at him with an almost sardonic grin.

"I don't think I'm anything," he replied. "I believe you're beginning to doubt my sanity. I don't blame you. A little more than a week ago I came here because I felt shot to pieces and you were the nearest doctor. I must have been a pretty funny specimen, spilling a love story and trying to hitch it up with a case of indigestion."

"No, that was sound enough."

"Maybe it was. I know I don't want to go through it again. And now—here I am, cutting up like a storybook detective. But that was only kidding. And yet—" Jimmy became serious. "Somehow, I've got a hunch that there's something in it."

"In what?"

"In this storybook business."

Hugh began to consider referring Jimmy to a neurologist. It was evident that the young man was highly sensitized and that it didn't take long for his impressions to become beliefs. But there seemed to be nothing dangerous in his interest in the unraveling of things.

"I wouldn't take it too seriously," he advised him. "By the time you come back from that week-end, you'll have forgotten Bernard Gartlin and all the rest of the crew."

"All right. I'll drop in for you Saturday."

Jimmy rose and lit another cigarette.

THERE was a guest book at Olean, in which all visitors were requested to inscribe some appropriate sentiment. John Gumbage, the only poet who ever had been honored with an invitation to stay at Olean, had commemorated the event with a few verses, composed, apparently on the spot, but later reprinted in his book, "A Sheaf for Melpomene." Although the demands of rhyme—Gumbage was an old-fashioned versifier—had interfered slightly with topographical accuracy, the song gave a good impression of Olean:

OLEAN

(FOR L. P.)

The roads that lead to Olean
Go winding over hills;
The lawns that spread through Olean
Are strewn with daffodils;
And through the night at Olean
Are singing whippoorwills.
The great white house of Olean
Lies smiling, gay and white;
The day is song at Olean,
And music all the night.
The vagrant come to Olean
Sees heaven in the sight.

Jimmy, scanning the guest-book, thought that at least one vagrant come to Olean had not found the sight entirely a heaven. The broad, two-story structure, with its huge parlors on the first floor and its many sleeping-rooms above, was too much like a summer hotel to hint of paradise. It stood on a sunken terrace in a clearing near the edge of a heavily wooded estate. The interior reflected wealth and luxury, if not taste. Every painting had a little electric light hung over it, giving the effect of an art gallery in a smoking-room.

Tea, it was announced, would be served in the sun parlor at four. Jimmy and Hugh strayed into this glass-encased chamber a few minutes before the appointed hour. Payne, wearing golf knickerbockers which did not flatter his gnarled legs, entered a moment later.

"Early, I see, gentlemen," he called out. "Welcome to Olean!"

Hugh made the introduction.

"Make yourself at home, Mr. Wrome," remarked Payne, giving Jimmy a severe handshake. "That's a rhyme. Maybe I could be a poet, if I had the time—eh, doctor?"

He strutted about.

"Ah, here are the others!" he announced.

Francis Gulvin and his wife entered. Gulvin was a young-looking young man with rather intense blue eyes and thin brown hair. He always looked at people as if he were about to give them information which would do them a great deal of good. His wife was a heavy, pale blonde woman, whose babylike features did not obscure the fact that she was older than her husband. Possibly because of her size she spoke in a sweet, light, almost infantile voice, illuminating her discourse with rapid gestures of her ornately ringed fingers.

Eddie Endle, the saxophone virtuoso, who looked the part of the leader of a smart dance orchestra, followed. He wore white flannels with broad blue stripes and he had tucked the ends of his washable bow tie under the folds of his removable silk collar.

After the usual desultory handshaking, the guests deposited themselves in various wicker chairs. Mrs. Gulvin insisted on sitting on the arm of Payne's rocker.

"There's nothing like making your husband jealous, is there, Mr. Payne?" she cooed. "It makes him appreciate you."

GULVIN merely glared at her and turned to Jimmy. "Is this your first visit here?" he inquired.

Jimmy admitted that it was.

"I like to come down here between sessions of the state legislature," continued Gulvin. "It's so restful. After the battles at Albany, I can always find peace here."

The manner was that of an unsuccessful orator, but Gulvin always was serious.

"I agree with you," said Jimmy. "Would you mind if I asked you a fairly personal question?"

"Not at all, not at all."

"If you like to go away for a rest," Jimmy went on, "why do you always take reports of one sort or another with you on your outings?"

Gulvin looked startled. "Who's been saying that about me?" he demanded.

"Nobody," answered Jimmy. "But the way the pockets of your outing jacket bulge indicates very plainly that you must have pamphlets in them a good deal of the time."

Hugh interrupted at this point. "Don't mind Mr. Wrome," he suggested. "He likes to deduce things about people. He's a transcendental detective."

"Are you connected with the service?" asked Gulvin, with sudden interest.

"No—and I'm not a detective, either. Not even a transcendent one."

"Anybody mentioned detectives?"

Endle had sauntered over to the group.

"No."

Jimmy smiled at Eddie.

"By the way," he added, "how did you happen to forget your cuff links?"

Endle looked at his sleeves.

"Me forget—"

Jimmy picked a tiny tuft of cotton from one of the virtuoso's ornaments.

"These are new. You must have bought them at the station as you came out. I've never seen links like these on sale at any other place."

Endle grinned foolishly. "I guess you're right about that," he confessed. "As I was comin' down in the taxi, I thought, 'Eddie, they's somethin' you've forgotten,' and I says 'What is it?' and then I remembered I'd left my cuff links in my room, and—"

"That's about the way I figured it out," Jimmy commented.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Payne's voice

broke through the mild hubbub. "May I introduce Miss Claire Barton?"

Jimmy jumped. Why hadn't Hugh told him that Claire would be one of the guests? Of all people he didn't want to hear about, much less meet— But there she was, lovely as ever, and with her—Blake Hesbe. Payne evidently knew Hesbe, for he introduced him to the company. Jimmy took a strange delight in crushing the hand, a far from sturdy hand, of the tow-headed young man. Blake, with his watery gray eyes, his receding chin and his colorless yellow hair, seemed less than ever a suitable companion for the bewitching Claire. Claire bowed to Jimmy gracefully, so far as the action went, but stiffly, so far as the implications were concerned. He thought that she looked a little drawn, on close inspection, but he could deduce nothing. In Claire's presence it was not easy to be rational.

THE butler, a bald little man named Stelker, served tea. Payne held a miniature court, surrounded by Mrs. Gulvin, Claire and Hesbe. Jimmy and Hugh sat on a divan. Gulvin sipped his drink abstractedly, and Endle walked about the room, looking at the sky.

"Storm comin'," he announced.

Payne scowled at the clouds in the west. "That's right." The on-coming disturbance seemed to upset Payne's good humor.

"Isn't this rotten?" he asked. "No golf—no tennis—no horseback." He glowered moodily.

Eddie's meteorological prophecy was coming closer to fulfilment every moment. A light breeze rattled the leaves. There was an ominous twittering of birds. The butler hurried to the veranda to furl the awnings against the rain. The sky looked as if a deep gray wind were blowing across it. Payne lit a shaded lamp near his chair. The butler crossed the room quietly, fastening the windows.

Mrs. Gulvin pushed aside her teacup.

"Let's tell ghost stories!" she cried enthusiastically.

Her husband shuddered. "That's like her," he remarked to Jimmy. "She's crazy about theatricals and I suppose she finds this a good setting for a thriller."

"It is," said Jimmy.

Hesbe, his pale face looking almost blue in the dim light, lit a cigarette and spoke. His voice had an edge in it and it quavered when he raised it.

"I heard a good story the other day," he volunteered. "It was a day like this, with a sudden storm. There was a man—down in Wall Street—who was sitting in his home, smoking. The storm made him feel bad. He hadn't been well, anyhow. And when he went to bed that night, he woke up in the middle of the night and it was still raining.

"All that got on his nerves and he took a gun from under his pillow and shot himself in the head. The next morning they found him dead, with a note saying he couldn't stand it any more."

He subsided, as though the exertion of narration had been a strain.

So this, thought Jimmy, was the man who had supplanted him in Claire's affections. He had met Hesbe somewhere, but Hesbe had made little impression on him. Insignificant, he would have called him. He wondered what Claire thought of Hesbe's foolish tale. It had grown dark outside, and the rain was smashing at the windows. The electric lights flickered uncertainly for a moment and went out. Lights had a way of going out in storms in Bellechester. A brilliant flash of lightning, which brought a shriek from Mrs. Gulvin, illuminated the room. Jimmy caught a glimpse of Hesbe's narrow face, his pale eyes almost white in the glare, peering at Claire. There was something malignant in that look. He couldn't get Claire's reaction. A new idea came to Jimmy. Was it affection, or was it fear that brought Claire to Hesbe? The lightning had revealed something sinister in the man's make-up. Or was it Jimmy's imagination working overtime?

"Let's have candles until the light's going again."

Payne's suggestion came out of the darkness.

"Oh, no, Mr. Payne!" Mrs. Gulvin, recovered from her fright, called out. "This is so delightfully spooky! Like the last act of—"

Eddie cleared his throat for attention. Probably he told his story—he was persistent. But no one heard it.

The lights went on again, suddenly. A shudder of relief ran through the company, but Payne seemed to be in one of his dull spells. Indeed, he looked anything but well.

His eyes were lusterless, and his face was drawn and sallow.

"Maybe you'd better lie down a little while, Mr. Payne." suggested Hugh.

"I feel rotten," murmured Payne, oblivious of his company. "That damn' shoulder—"

"It's the weather," explained Hugh.

Payne groaned.

"Get them away for a little while," Hugh whispered to Gulvin. "He'll feel better when he's alone."

Jimmy noticed Hesbe looking sharply at Claire as the guests left the room. Claire went rather quickly and in marked agitation. He lingered for a moment. Hugh nodded for Jimmy to go. Hugh seemed to be affected by the storm. He looked disturbed and worried.

"HERE," thought Jimmy, "is the beginning—or is it the end?—of a mystery story."

"Get the butler," Hugh called out to Jimmy.

Jimmy rang various bells in the foyer. Several servants rushed out.

"Mr. Payne isn't well," he told the butler. "I think Dr. Farrigan would like you to help him."

The man nodded and entered the sun parlor.

Meanwhile, the guests had scattered about the house. Jimmy walked into the little den which served as a smoking-room, and lit a cigarette. Endle came in.

"Honest," observed Eddie, "I hope all this company didn't do him no harm."

Jimmy looked about. "I wouldn't worry about that," he said cheerfully. "He's been jumpy and nervous for a long time, they tell me."

"I'd feel like hell if I thought—"

Jimmy offered him a cigarette.

"I don't think there's any connection between our presence and Mr. Payne's illness," he remarked. "Do you read detective stories?"

"Not since I was a kid," sniffed Eddie.

"This is all a little like one," continued Jimmy. "It begins with a party. Then a sudden storm. The lights go out, and when they come up again, the host—and he's just like the hosts in those stories—is all upset."

"Never read that kind," said Eddie. "Nick Carter was my speed."

"You'd like Bernard Gartlin," mused Jimmy, "the man of a million masks."

Hugh led Payne past the den.

"Want any help?" asked Jimmy.

Payne looked about with a wan smile. "Help?" He laughed. "I want you folks to have a good time." His face became animated. "You came out here for a good time and I'll see to it you'll get it!" he cried out. "Doctor, I want you to see they all have a good time."

"All right, Mr. Payne," Hugh replied. "Now, suppose you rest for a while."

"Oh, I'll rest," snarled Payne. "You take charge of these people and amuse 'em." He stopped at the stairs. "Endle!" he called out. "Take everybody over to that dump of yours and give 'em a good dinner at my expense. Let 'em dance all night. That'll be the stuff."

Eddie stared at him dumbly.

"I mean it," insisted Payne. "Doctor, you gather 'em all together and Eddie'll take care of 'em over at Shuffle Inn, or whatever you call the damn' place."

"Better go up," urged Hugh.

Payne's face became fiercely set.

"I won't move a step—not a damn' step—until you say you'll do as I tell you. That's all."

Hugh shrugged his shoulders. Payne's "That's all" was almost mesmeric. He bowed acquiescence and led Payne to his room.

"Good scene, don't you think?" remarked Jimmy.

"Huh?" Endle didn't understand.

"Like one of those mystery stories I was telling you about," explained Jimmy. "The stern old bachelor goes up the stairs, his fiery spirit still glowing."

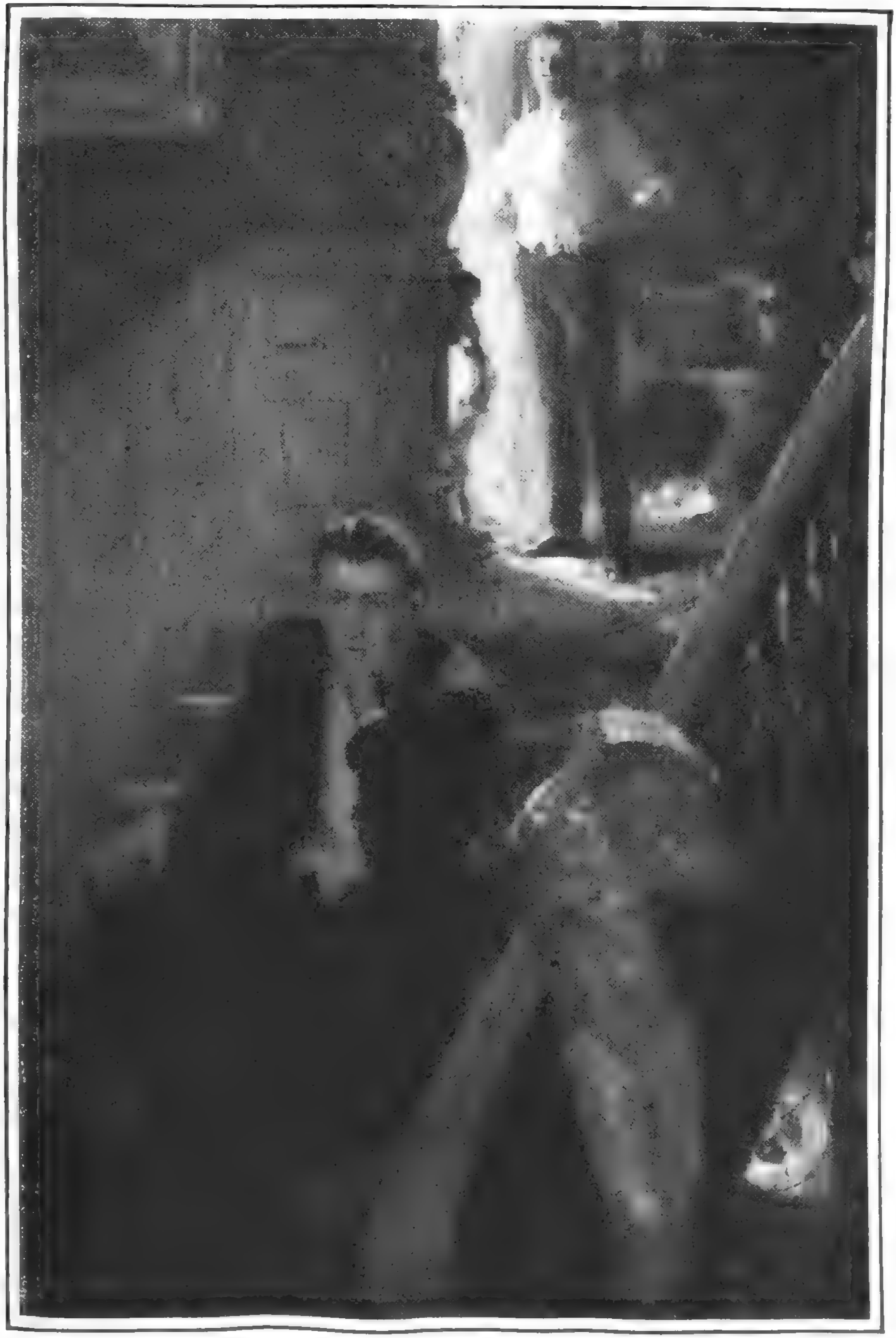
"Can't say I get you," apologized Eddie. "What do you mean—mystery stories?"

"Just a hobby of mine," laughed Jimmy. "I suppose I've got them on the brain. People are always having things on the brain nowadays. I suppose they always did, but they didn't make so much fuss about it before psychoanalysis became popular."

"What's that?"

"Psychoanalysis? It means that you're hipped on something. Like these new novelists. You know—vermin in stones, crooks in the running brooks and sex in everything."

Eddie reached bewildered for a cigarette.



"Merely as a matter of professional ethics, I might say that it's none of your business," said Hugh. "But I'll satisfy your curiosity—partly. Mr. Payne has had a seizure."

"Don't be alarmed," Jimmy continued. He peered out of the window. "Nice night for a ride over to your place," he commented.

"Storms is good for us," said Endle, glad to reach intelligible ground. "You mightn't think so now, but it's a fact, they is. It's the hot, quiet nights when nobody feels like eatin' or drinkin' or anything that we lose."

Jimmy was first down except for the Gulvins, who had dressed with terrific speed.

He sat down and looked at the Gulvins, who looked back. It was one of those dumb moments, when no one knows what to say or has much to say. Jimmy wondered whether he ought to read a newspaper. Then he thought of a better plan.

"I wish I were married, Mr. Gulvin."

Mrs. Gulvin beamed on him. Her husband was puzzled.

"I do," continued Jimmy, "because then I wouldn't have to tie my own ties."

"See, Frank!" exclaimed Mrs. Gulvin delightedly. "Anybody can see you can't tie your own!"

"That isn't quite correct, Mrs. Gulvin," objected Jimmy. "I don't say that Mr. Gulvin can't tie his own. But I do say that you tie them for him. And I wonder why you still use the old-fashioned method of standing behind him when you do it."

"Now, you've been peeking through our keyhole," giggled Mrs. Gulvin.

"I didn't even know you had a keyhole," retorted Jimmy. "But the powder marks on your husband's shoulders, not to mention on his collar and shirt front, tell me which way the bow was bent."

"You're so clever!" cried Mrs. Gulvin. "Isn't he, Francis?"

"Very observant," said Mr. Gulvin.

"You'd be just the man for my little theater, Mr. Wrome," said Mrs. Gulvin. "I'm sure you'd make a splendid actor. Now, don't tell me you haven't acted!"

"I certainly will tell you," replied Jimmy, amiably. "I've never acted and I've never wanted to."

The entrance of Hugh hushed the controversy.

"The cars are waiting outside," remarked Dr. Farrigan. "We'll be off soon."

"How is dear Mr. Payne?" gushed Mrs. Gulvin. "I do hope it's nothing serious."

"Nothing serious." Hugh's tone was curt.

"He was so interested in the Atom Theater," she confided to Jimmy. "It would be terrible, if—" Her eyes rolled sorrowfully.

WAS this woman involved with Payne, too? Jimmy shook his head as if to brush off the reiterant notion that Payne was the center of a plot. He accompanied the Gulvins into one of Payne's limousines, while Claire and Hesbe went with Hugh in another. The rain had turned into a light drizzle, but it was warm again and close. Jimmy felt uncomfortable in the enclosed car. He wanted air. He wanted to escape Mrs. Gulvin's violent scent. He wanted to escape Gulvin's political cigar. He wanted a fresh breeze to clear his mind.

The brilliant lights of Shuffle Inn flickered in the mists. Endle had kept his promise. Jimmy found himself near the bandstand with the Gulvins. Far down the long, narrow room he saw Claire, resplendent in a striking evening gown, and Hesbe, looking out of place in evening clothes, with Hugh. Claire began dancing with Hesbe. Jimmy writhed at the sight. Hesbe was a cheek-by-jowl terpsichorean. It was evident that he had respect for Claire, for he didn't grip her as other young men on the floor clutched their partners. But he was an intimate if not a gracile dancer. Jimmy was tempted to cut in. The result of such a proceeding would be interesting. But there was already a barrier of distance between himself and Claire. She was a little like a stranger. If only she were more of a stranger or less of one!

The night was filled with music, and it was a long night. Jimmy forgot Claire, forgot the possible mystery surrounding Payne, forgot even the inconvenience of dancing with Mrs. Gulvin. Food came and went before him. Waiters glided by, whispering monosyllables which were answered by meaningless nods. Eddie's rhythmic incense had taken possession of the room.

It was a gorgeously liveried attendant who broke the spell. He muttered something to Endle, who answered with a nod of his saxophone in the direction of Claire's table. The attendant hurried to the table, where Hugh was sitting alone while Hesbe was swinging Claire giddily about the floor. Hugh jumped up, looked for Claire and Hesbe, made a little resigned motion with his hands, and followed the attendant.

Jimmy hurried after him as he left the dining-room. Something had happened! And yet—it might be only another Italian woman with a fractured wrist. He saw Hugh enter a telephone booth. Hugh spoke quickly and hung up the receiver decisively. He started as he saw Jimmy waiting for him.

"You've had unexpected news," began Jimmy pleasantly.

"There's no mystery about this!" snapped Hugh. "I'll have to go back to the house at once. Explain it to the rest."

"Anything serious?"

"Explain why I left. No—don't say it's anything serious. I don't know what it is."

He hurried to the cloak room.

Jimmy entered the booth. The thing had happened. Something was in the air. His premonitions had not been products of a brain overfed with fiction. He would call Payne's house. A low voice answered.

"Who's this?"

It was the butler's voice, nearly inaudible, agonized.

"Mr. Wrome."

The voice lapsed.

"How's Mr. Payne?"

The repetition of Jimmy's question was ghastly.

"He's—"

The voice became strident.

"Where's Dr. Farrigan? Isn't he coming? Tell him to hurry—hurry—"

"He's on his way," answered Jimmy. "Can I be of any use?"

"My God, sir, I don't know—no—don't—I can't say anything now, sir—you'd better not—not now—"

A click told Jimmy that the butler had no more to say.

He rushed to the door. He could hear the motor bearing Hugh down the road to Olean. Could he take the other car? And leave the rest here? He could send the chauffeur back.

He started for the dining-room again. How dull it seemed in there, with the music tick-tocking away and people shoving each other lazily about. He couldn't sit there again. He saw Mrs. Gulvin looking eagerly at him. No! He'd go back. What did he care!

He found the chauffeur in the courtyard. It was cooler now, and the stars blazed over the road to Olean.

"Mr. Payne's house," cried Jimmy, hoarse with excitement, "and drive like hell!"

JIMMY'S rapping on the windows of the limousine caused the driver to stop the car a few hundred yards from the house. Olean glittered in the moonlight, shining phosphorescently in the clearing. A dim inverted light at the entrance was a weak yellow guide-post. Save this and the reflection of the stars against the windows, there seemed to be no light inside the house.

"Wait," Jimmy told the chauffeur.

He tiptoed up the damp road leading to the graveled ways about the house. He wondered whether he was tiptoeing to protect his patent leather shoes against the mud or to avoid detection. A slight breeze in the branches near by sounded like the echo of footsteps.

"It's a promising beginning," Jimmy murmured as he crept carefully to the door.

There seemed to be no activity within. The screen door was insecurely fastened and the inner glass door was open. Any one could have entered—or had Hugh failed to close it behind him? Jimmy dropped his hat on a chair and investigated the parlors and the den. No one was there.

He went warily up the stairs to the landing. If anything had happened it must have been in Payne's room at the end of the corridor. The transom, covered with green cloth, showed a dim light. Jimmy walked carefully on the thick rugs in the hall. He heard footsteps in Payne's room and stood in the darkness of the walls to see whether any one would come out.

A stream of light was pointing directly at him. And then there was a scream.

"My God!"

It was the butler, who had come out with a flash lamp.

Hugh strode savagely out of the room. Jimmy could see him snatch the lamp from the butler's twitching hand.

"What are you doing here?" Hugh's voice was sharp.

Jimmy felt calm and amused. Whatever the mystery was, and the indications were that a mystery was to hand, he was in on it early.

"I just thought I might be of some use," he answered.

Hugh motioned for him to go to the other end of the corridor.

"Stay in Mr. Payne's room, Stelke," he snapped to the butler, apparently warding off a protest.

Hugh and Jimmy walked silently down the hall. Jimmy noticed that Hugh was in his shirt-sleeves and that his eyes were unusually bright. He looked pale. No doubt about it. Something eventful had taken place. But what? This happening couldn't be deduced from shirt-sleeves. Deduction seemed to be of little avail with so little to deduce from.

They sat down at the top of the stairs.

"I could tell something was seriously wrong with Mr. Payne," Jimmy explained apologetically, "and I thought I could be of some use."

"Well, you can't be of the slightest use," said Hugh. "In fact, you're more likely to be in the way. So you might just as well go back to the Inn and let out your spirit of adventure over there."

Jimmy wasn't going to be eliminated from a possible mystery as easily as that.

"But what's happened?" he asked.

HUGH turned the flash lamp on him and shook his head disgustedly. "Merely as a matter of professional ethics, if nothing more, I might say that it's none of your business," he said. "But if you've taken the trouble to come chasing all the way back, I'll satisfy your curiosity—partly. Mr. Payne has had a seizure. Nothing can be done now, and it's just as well that nobody should know it until morning. Now, go back or go to bed. If it's anything for you to know, you'll know it soon enough."

Hugh rose from the step.

"I'm going back now," he said, brandishing the lamp. "Good night."

Jimmy sat on the stairs, reflecting, as Hugh paced down the corridor. This was no ordinary seizure. Something had happened to Payne. Jimmy paced down the stairs into the den and hunted a cigarette.

"You were looking for your situation," he told himself, "and you've found it—or you're inventing it."

Jimmy stopped chattering as he lit his cigarette. He went to the porch. Down the path he could see the searchlights of the automobile. Go back? Not while there was a life-and-death aroma about Olean. He'd send the chauffeur back.

The driver looked at Jimmy suspiciously, but obeyed. Jimmy trudged back to the house and went to his room. There was a little balcony outside the window. Jimmy sat on the railing and looked out over the stretch of lawn ending in the woods. This solitary manor. This feeble light in the master's room. The butler's alarm. The doctor's reticence. The ironic contrast of the guests making merry at a distant inn, while their host lay—stricken, perhaps even—dead!

Jimmy looked at the brilliant sky. He would like to have Claire at his side now, gazing at the heavens with him, silently, or perhaps whispering tender endearments. Claire, his lost love, Claire, the only one who ever had meant anything to him. Claire—who was dancing in the clumsy arms of another man only a few miles away.

"That's enough," he told himself then. "You're getting maudlin, along with the rest of it. If you can't see a doctor working at midnight without fancying a murder and if you can't see the stars without thinking sentimentally of a particular girl—why, that's plenty."

He lit the lamp in his room. What would be the use of sitting here until dawn? Might as well sleep. He yawned at the thought. Read a little, and go to sleep.

IT WAS a dazzling Sunday morning when Jimmy awoke. The lawn and the trees glittered, and the stretch of road visible from the window sparkled. There was a delicious breeze. Jimmy wriggled happily. He tossed aside the covers and consulted his watch. Eleven! He hurried his dressing and went into the dining-room.

Apparently every one had eaten except a new guest, a sallow, middle-aged man who was drinking coffee solemnly, stirring the beverage constantly and tapping the spoon thoughtfully against the side of the cup. Jimmy bowed to the newcomer, who returned the salutation without interest. Who could this be?

Stelke entered, looking graver than ever. He moved about nervously as he saw Jimmy.

"Good morning," Jimmy called out almost boisterously.

Stelke returned the greeting in a dead tone.

"How's Mr. Payne this morning?" continued Jimmy cheerfully.

Stelke almost collapsed at the question and the stranger dropped his spoon with a clatter.

"What's your name?" demanded the sallow man.

Jimmy told him. So, he concluded, something *had* happened to his host.

"When did you get here?" the newcomer went on.

"About the same time as the others," Jimmy answered, "only they don't seem to sleep so well."

The sallow man stared at him penetratingly.

"Look here," he said brusquely. "Don't you know what's happened?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"Well, it's about time you knew."

The stranger pointed his remarks with the spoon.

"Payne died last night. In fact—you might as well know now—he shot himself!"

So said everybody else but Jimmy: he had noticed a few things that didn't jibe. The second instalment of "The Doctor Disagrees" will appear in December EVERYBODY'S, out November 15.

Everybody's for December

A complete novel, "The Valley of Humility" (see page 133); two serials, "March Winds" (see page 76), "The Sea Horses," and—

A Novelette

The Seeds of Greatness — By Ralph Barstow

An obscure restaurant furnishes a character that makes a big story

A Novelette

The Bwana Who Laughed — By William Ashley Anderson

It's an unbalanced man who has never thought of a woman

Short Stories

King o' the Plain — By Arthur Mills

Another exciting adventure of a tramp on horseback

The Red in the Devil's Hair — By Karl W. Detzer

A man who made way with himself in order better to practice his profession

Both in the Money — By Sam Carson

The reading of scented correspondence before a race is bad for jockeys

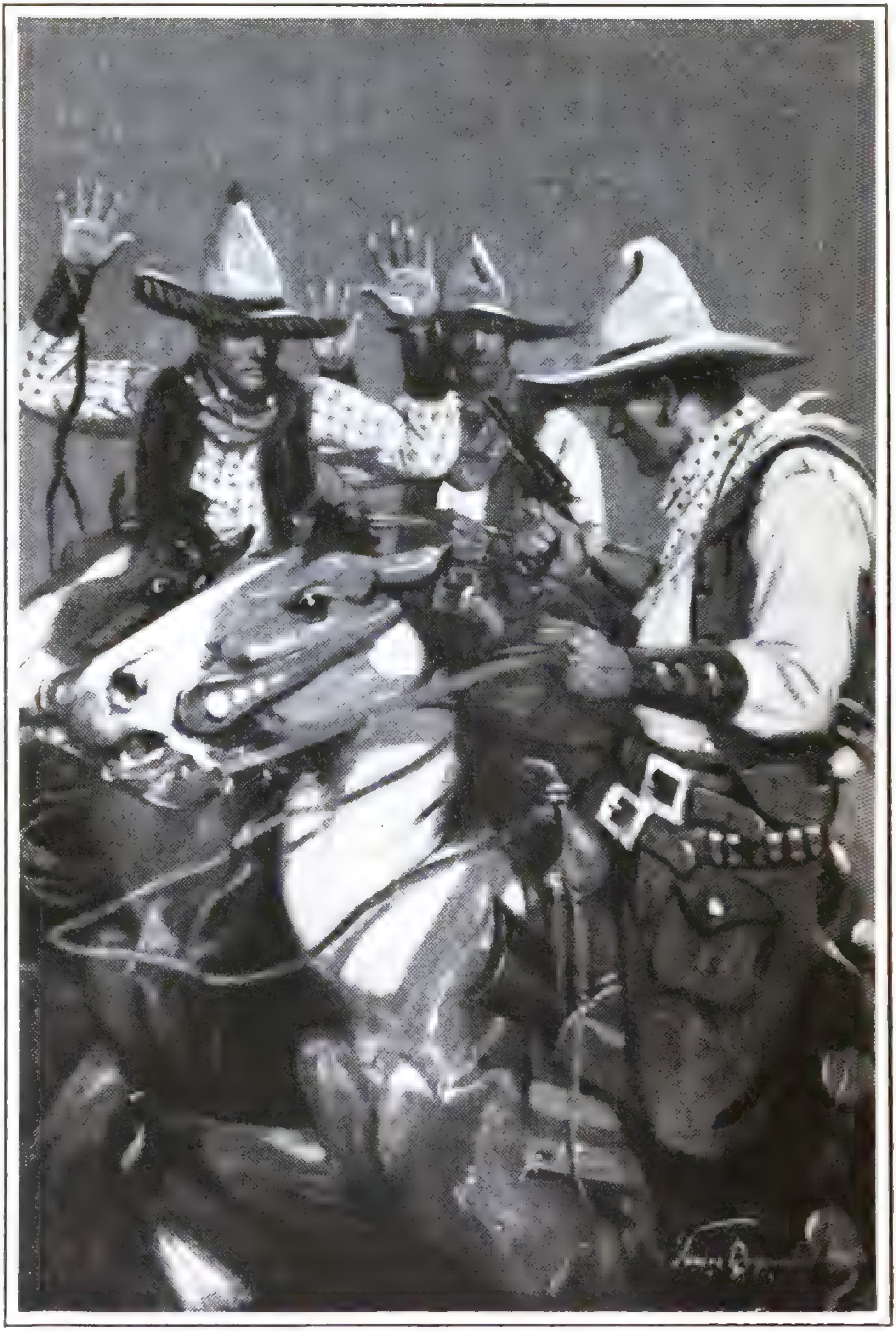
The Soul of Caliban — By Emma-Lindsay Squier

An answer to those who say animals have no souls

The Greatest Lover — By John Farrar

How husbands are sometimes chosen. A story with a point

December *EVERYBODY'S* Out November 15



The first thing to do was to disarm them. Instinctively Glennister decided that the tall man must be disarmed first. "I'll take your gun!" he snapped.

A Novelette

Pictures

A Daydreaming Tenderfoot from the East Finds the Modern West Much More Truly Alive Than He Imagined

By Laurie York Erskine

Illustration by James Reynolds

JOHN GLENNISTER had come into the West to find adventure. You mustn't laugh, for it was not a laughable thing; it was not even a futile thing. For John Glennister did not ask for much. He was very young and he could find his adventure in the contemplation of pictures.

The fact that, pictorially, that section of the West in which chance had placed him, lived nobly up to the Remington prints upon which his youthful imagination had been fed, permitted him to invest the natives he met with a glamour of romance quite beyond the circumstances of their life. And he did this deliberately. He had pictured the tall man with the sandy beard who swaggered in and out of the business places along the main street of Sandstone in a variety of quivering adventures without for a moment forgetting that his subject was Mason Maddox, lawyer, banker and proprietor of Tully's Hotel. It was the clothes Maddox wore that did the trick. And John Glennister never hesitated when passing the bluff that overhung the turning of the Curly Arrow trail to place himself and Jesse Gerrish there with their backs to the rock and a horde of foemen to subdue, because, although he was as well aware as you are that Jesse clerked at Mengelburg's General Store, Jesse had a face that might have been a model for one of Remington's plainsmen.

This imaginative faculty John naturally kept to himself, but he enjoyed it immensely nevertheless, for it was a thing he could not possibly have done back in Pittsburgh, and it contented him. It contented him so well that he had quite put out of mind the possibilities of life and was amazed beyond measure at the discovery that such small matters as make up negligible newspaper items may yield to the actors in them the excitement of veritable romance.

Here he was, for instance, in the dead of night, sitting his saddle in the river bottom, watching the water as its silver surface broke into turbulence at the ford, and conscious of the black line which the opposite bank threw against the sky. Above him was a moon which cast the shadow of the bluff like a dark cloak over him. He sat there with the feel of his mount between his knees and his right hand on the butt of the revolver that hung from his belt, and he knew that all his dreams and visions meant nothing to him now, for the real adventure had come.

Cowdray, the foreman, had driven into Sandstone that evening with the overheated engine of his car pounding. He had found John Glennister at the bank, where the exigencies of modern ranch life seemed to demand that a boss ranchman spend half his time; and there in the lobby of the bank Cowdray had given him the alarm. Seven of his horses were stolen; seven horses with the Curly Arrow brand on their flanks—two white ones, a roan, and four bays. A cowpuncher had seen the thieves herding them across country to the south. Two men there had been, and one had worn something of flaming red on his sombrero.

Cowdray, lean, experienced and quick, had sent out his riders and further analyzed the situation as he drove into Sandstone. In the imitative grandeur of the little bank he had given the results of his analysis to Glennister with a curt, decisive note in his voice that was a command. He would ride with the sheriff for the Tinto Hills, whither the thieves were no doubt bound; but they might cut across the bottoms of the Fulglove range. He had sent out riders to cover that country, but the ford of the Tinto River should be watched. They'd use that ford if the Curly Arrow riders drove them west. Glennister had better cover the ford. So it came to pass that John Glennister sat his saddle in the night with the moon above him and with the knowledge in his heart that the horse thieves would use that ford.

Cowdray had treated the thing very lightly. It had seemed a small matter to Cowdray that Glennister should ride forth alone over the yellow grass-land and, all alone, prevent two desperadoes from crossing that ford with his stolen horses. Of course—embarrassment afflicted John Glennister for a moment—in Cowdray's eyes horse thieves were perhaps no longer desperadoes; and anyway, Cowdray did not know that the fugitives would use that ford. But John Glennister did. He sensed it in his bones.

HE SAT amid all the stage settings of western adventure. The water flashed at his feet; the cut bank was black above him—and he was armed for encounter. It was a page from Remington. Better, it was the real thing, for no picture could have the scent and atmosphere of this reality. The horse thieves must come by this ford, said John Glennister's heart to himself, for it could not be that he must return with his gun and his horse and his brave spirit unassuaged. These things moved in his mind as he sat there in his cloak of impenetrable shadow; and, as he dwelt upon them, seven horses came noisily down to the ford.

Involuntarily Glennister caught up his reins as his heart was caught up with a start that set it pounding in his throat. The movement set his pony trotting forward, and in the fleet division of a minute that brought him out of his black concealment into the moonlight at the water's edge, Glennister drew his gun, counted the horses—two white ones, a roan and four bays—and examined the two riders who herded them. They drew rein, for they could not cross the ford without passing his gun.

"Hands up!" cried Glennister in a high throaty tenor. "Throw 'em up!" The words came into his mouth without thought, as he drew in his pony and sat there, like a statue, barring them from the crossing.

The moonlight was behind him, and it shone lambently upon the faces of the two men who now sat in their saddles as still as he and regarded him with their hands held high.

"It's your move," said one of these.

His tone was peculiarly soft and limpid; a womanish voice, thought Glennister, and he was surprised. For the man who spoke was tall above common; he was broad of shoulder and slim of waist; he sat his horse with that easy grace which accompanied John Glennister's dream of what a horseman should be; and his face was long and aquiline: a fine, strong face; a face cast in copper with thin, firm lips that were now closed with an inscrutable resolution. Glennister could not see the man's eyes because a wide-brimmed sombrero threw a black shadow which was a mask across them. The sombrero was decorated with a tassel of horse-hair that was stained with bright vermilion.

The other man was a squat figure in the darkness, with a square, unshaven face. He might have been a farm hand anywhere in the world. But the other, the tall one . . .

"It's your move," said this startling figure of the night; and John Glennister, as he moved forward, reflected that this was as it should be.

The tall man surely fitted into the picture. But, as he urged his pony forward, Glennister felt as well that, while this strange horse thief fitted into the picture with a grotesque consistency, he himself did not belong there at all. He had not the remotest idea of what to do. The horses he was to reclaim had ambled across the ford, and he knew the futility of trying to recover them with these two men in hand.

Also, while he held them under his gun, he felt no confidence in his capacity to do the right thing if they should resist. The first thing to do, he reasoned, was to disarm them. He was wise enough to know the disaster which would follow if he demanded that they cast their weapons away, but he was less sure of his ability to take them away himself. Instinctively he decided that the tall man must be disarmed first. He permitted his pony to walk forward until he was beside this tall man, and facing him. He moved his revolver from side to side, nerving himself to fire upon either one who might first move his hands.

"I'll take your gun!" he snapped, and he stretched his left hand across his body, reaching for the weapon that hung from the other's belt. As he did this he was conscious of the awkwardness of his position, and as he became conscious of that awkwardness, disaster befell him.

As Glennister reached forward, the tall man with the princely, aquiline face did not move his arms or relax his imperturbable gaze into the boy's eyes; but his right leg came up with a kick that roweled with a Spanish spur the flank of Glennister's pony, and the beast plunged away as though seared with a hot iron. As the pony plunged, Glennister, who was not yet a perfect horseman, flung out his arms to regain his balance. His tall opponent immediately seized, with a snakelike movement, the gun in Glennister's fingers, and Glennister's outraged pony did the rest. The pony bucked away toward the river bank. Glennister lost his balance, and clutching in vain at his saddle horn, fell to the earth, leaving his revolver in the hand of the copper-hued horse thief.

He heard the two men laugh as they went galloping across the ford, and on all fours he knelt and saw the spray from the hoofs of their ponies glitter like massed pearls in the moonlight before it fell back to the river.

He arose and saw them disappear with his seven horses in a manner which had to do with the alchemy of the clear night air. That clear air hung about him and pressed him with its stillness, and the grotesque perfection of the moon painted the river with brilliant glitter and black shadow. In the yellow lambency of the prairie that stretched away on the other side of the river, it seemed to Glennister as if he might have seen an object miles away; and yet, having crossed the river, his thieves and his horses had been swallowed up as though, having been painted with a swift brush upon the surface of the prairie, they had been as suddenly erased.

He found his pony grazing philosophically at the top of the bank, and for a moment he thought of following the thieves; but he reflected that since, armed, he had been so negligible, without his gun, he would be quite impotent. So he rode back to Sandstone, and as he rode he reflected bitterly upon the ignominious end of his adventure.

CANTERING through the dusty grass toward the highway, Glennister came upon two riders who emerged from the diffused radiance of the night as bodies emerge from mist. They were Cowdray and Alf Drane, the sheriff. He hailed them and they parted, permitting him to come between them; and the three horsemen jogged along, raising a faint dust in the unmoving air. Glennister had felt that this occasion would demand hurried words, an urgent recital of the occurrence at the ford, and a hasty dispatching of the sheriff and his men in grim pursuit. Yet he rode beside these men in silence, disconcerted by their manner.

Neither Cowdray nor the sheriff had greeted him eagerly. They had answered his hail and given him a place beside them with more of forbearance than of cordiality, and they seemed to have no interest whatever in his business. It was as though he had fallen in with two complete strangers rather than two men intent upon the same mission as himself. They jogged along on either side with an indifference to his presence that was unaffected and complete. Glennister had never felt so definitely an outlander. He could realize and appreciate more vividly than they the romantic picture which they formed as with creaking saddles and lurching steeds they moved through the moonlight; he could seize upon and find a certain satisfaction in the fact that they rode thus armed in the night on a mission of adventure; but he knew that he saw the picture because he did not belong to it. Adventure, he reflected, was not complete until it was a commonplace.

"I got their trail," he said at last.

"Where?" asked Cowdray. His voice was full of honest disbelief.

"At the ford of the Tinto. They've passed into the Fulglove range."

"Why didn't yer stop 'em?" sniffed Drane.

Glennister felt himself flush at the big man's tone. "I did, but they got away," he said.

They didn't reply to that, but rode forward in a heavy silence. Glennister grew angry. Resentment seethed and simmered in his mind. They must think he was a kid to treat him this way. And who were they? A hick politician and a ranch foreman; that was all. *His* ranch foreman, Cowdray was. He paid Cowdray out of his own pocket. . . . And back in Pittsburgh his father could have bought up any number of ward heelers like Drane. . . . And they treated him like a kid!

GLENNISTER felt that he must make his position clear to them, show them that he was no tenderfoot kid to be treated in this manner. But when he spoke only the protest of a boy came forth.

"I couldn't help it," he burst forth. "There was a big fellow there. He looked like an Indian. I had them covered, but like a fool I got too close to this big fellow—I was going to take his gun away. He dug his spur into my pony, and"—he laughed nervously—"I lost my seat. He grabbed my gun when I fell." He looked at Drane, who bulkily filled his saddle on Glennister's right, and then at Cowdray. They gazed stiffly forward, ignoring him. "I got too close," he tailed off lamely. Then he listened to the creak of the leather and the scuffle of the ponies' feet as they jogged on.

"Hmph!" Cowdray suddenly broke the silence by expelling his breath forcibly through his nostrils.

"Well?" said Drane.

"Well, you're going after them, aren't you?" Glennister writhed inwardly in impotent rage. Hadn't he done his best? How was he to guess that the big Indian would use his spurs? He secretly cursed the luck that had thrown him into such an ignominious position before these silent plainsmen. "If you get after them now, you can ride 'em down before morning!" he cried. He tried to put a sneer into his tone, a note of curt command, a suggestion of the small regard he held for Drane's capacity. But the bulky man beside him betrayed no sign of resentment.

"You don't do like that, buddy," he drawled gruffly. "You'd best come down to the town and swear out a warrant. Come down in the morning."

"In the morning? They'll be to hell an' gone by then!"

They had come to the top of a bank now, a bank of sand that fell away to the white ribbon of macadam that was the highway. Drane gave Glennister no answer, but gazed thoughtfully down the bank as his pony placed fastidious hoofs over the rim. Cowdray seemed to have retired from conversation for the night. Without speaking they rode and slid gingerly down to the highway, and there on the macadam they stood, Drane with his pony headed toward Sandstone, Cowdray headed toward the ranch. Glennister sat in his saddle undecided.

"You don't mean you'll wait till morning?" he cried.

Drane grunted out a laugh.

"If you'd wanted them you'd 'a' held on to 'em," he said.

"S'long, Alf," said Cowdray. He was obviously waiting for Glennister to join him on the ride to the Curly Arrow Ranch.

"S'long, Dave," cried Drane, and he shook out his reins, causing his pony to singlefoot forward. "S'long, Mr. Glennister," he drawled.

"S'long!" snapped Glennister.

His pony trotted to its place beside Cowdray's mount, and the two of them cantered in silence along the hard white road. Glennister felt indescribably chagrined as he swayed in his saddle. They had conjured his adventure into nothingness. He felt like a guilty urchin when he should have been a firm and formidable man. And they—they acted with all the heat and desperate resolution of bookkeepers worried over a trial balance.

They reached the ranch and rode past the house to leave their ponies at the barn. As they dismounted Cowdray broke the silence.

"You'd ought to 'a' held on to 'em," he said. His tone was very kindly—the tone of a man toward a boy who, having bungled a job, is to be pitied rather than censured.

"I suppose so," said Glennister. "Good night."

"Good night," said Cowdray.

THE reason which had prompted Dave Cowdray to offer his young employer the solace of that fatherly consolation as they dismounted in the night, was perhaps best summed up in the somewhat vague reflections that passed through the cattleman's mind as from the porch of the little ranch "office" he watched Glennister climb into the ranch car the next morning. Glennister was six feet tall. He was very broad of shoulder, and from a tireless devotion to athletics he had derived a figure that tapered away to his hips and from hip to heel in lines that were clear-cut and fine. He was fair of hair, and the sun had tanned his features a nut-brown. As he climbed to the seat of the car he threw off his hat; his hair sparkled in the sunlight.

"He's a good kid," ran the vague reflection in Cowdray's mind. "He won't ever make a ranch boss to amount to anything. He ain't cut out fer this country. He's a dood. But he's a good kid."

Glennister was not aware of this, however, as he sped toward the town. It is doubtful whether it would have brightened the morning for him if he had been aware of Cowdray's admiration; but he wasn't, and the morning was very black. He felt that in going to Drane for this warrant he was eating humble pie before the bulky sheriff. Yet he couldn't let the horse thieves get away without an effort, and evidently nothing would move Drane to further exertion without that warrant.

Sandstone was not particularly active at the time of his arrival. There were a few small cars along the main street, and the usual assortment of natives to be seen. Outside the hotel a few traveling men rocked in the shaky rocking-chairs provided for that purpose and picked their teeth with a calm disdain of their environment. Directly opposite, a group of cowpunchers loafed outside Mengelburg's store and calmly answered that disdain. The sheriff's office was above the store, and you approached it by a narrow stairway that ran up the exterior of the frame building. Glennister ran his car to the edge of the boardwalk and, without putting on his hat, crossed to the stairs, whereupon traveling men and cowpunchers formed a tentative alliance of shocked propriety. The young man wore no hat! In Sandstone one did not run around in public without a hat. Even the Indians wore hats.

Drane sat with his chair tipped back against the wall. His feet were on his desk. He used the desk for no other purpose. With his chair tipped back, and his feet on the sheriff's desk, Patch Appsley, jailor, stableman, and Drane's henchman in time of need, sat and told of his latest achievements at the gaming table, which gave him his occupation in life. Neither of the men moved when Glennister entered the little room, and Appsley finished his current remark before either of them acknowledged the newcomer's entrance.

"The pore dobie thought I had anyways a royal flush!" finished Patch loudly, and then he, too, betrayed the violence rendered his sense of the proprieties by the sight of Glennister's unclothed head.

"Good mornin', Mr. Glennister," said Drane.

He gazed at Glennister with the same cold gravity which had burdened his silences of the previous night. In the daylight, however, his heavy face appeared vaguely derisive. Glennister's fists itched to punch it.

"Done anything to get those horse thieves?" he asked.

"No. Have you got the warrant?" Drane spoke with a certain tolerant annoyance as though mildly vexed by a negligible interruption.

"That's what I came for," said Glennister. "But you don't suppose you'll get 'em now? You don't suppose they're making camp and waiting for you, do yer?" Looking upon Drane's heavy red face, Glennister found it difficult to suppress his anger. "I guess you needn't be afraid of meeting up with 'em now!" he cried bitterly.

To his surprise Drane didn't fly into a rage at this taunt. He moved neither his chair nor his elevated feet. His red face turned deeper red and into the oxlike gravity of his gaze crept a glow of unquenchable resentment. But he held his temper.

"You got to get it orf the J.P.," he said, with the contempt of the strong for little things. "Next door down the hall."

Glennister strode from the room in the possession of an anger that gave a forceful dignity to his exit. He slammed the door behind him and crashed into the room next door with a resolution and a repressed fury that must have startled and impressed whoever might have been within. But the room was empty.

Glennister had not reckoned upon that. He stood inside the door of the tiny and dilapidated office with a ludicrous sense of bafflement. What could he do now? It was out of the question to go back to Drane and take up again the futile insistence that the sheriff proceed without warrant. Drane was snubbing him; as long as he could set an obstacle in the way, Drane would not move to help him. And the lack of this warrant was all Drane could desire. Glennister gazed for a moment on the scarred desk of old Perkins, the Justice of the Peace. It seemed that he must wait for the old man's return. And while he waited the thieves would be well away from all fear of pursuit. Impatiently Glennister turned from the littered desk to stare savagely out of the window, considering his predicament. His eyes fell upon a brown motor-car that glided smoothly down the rutted main street, and there was a girl who sat at the wheel of that car. Then Glennister's predicament fled from his mind entirely.

THE girl at the wheel of the brown car was just such a girl as you might meet at a college hop any day of the year; and afterward you would remember that she had been among the pretty ones. But in Sandstone, where girls of any sort are as rare as taxicabs, she appeared before the eyes of young Glennister with the glory of beauty enthroned. With rare freshness of imagery he saw her pink cheeks as full-blown roses; her lips, curved in a good-humored smile, were as the ripe promise of red cherries; and the brown hair which swept back in a soft wave from her forehead filled his hands with a desire to touch it softly. His eyes dwelt upon her and devoured the merry smile with which she viewed carelessly the rutted street through which the brown car rolled, and his predicament was lost; then his eyes passed to the man who sat beside her with one arm resting familiarly along the back of the seat behind her shoulders, and his predicament flung its burden upon him with a twofold weight. For that man was the copper-faced horse thief of the night before!

The morning sunlight was yellow. It beat down upon Sandstone with a peculiar, warm ferocity. It bathed everything it touched with its rich, hot color and threw every corner that defied it into clean-cut shadow. The man and girl in the car were clear in the sunlight. While Glennister watched them, the girl steered the machine to the plank walk before the store and they sat there, talking. The man was dressed in a suit of large gray checks. His copper-colored face, handsome and aquiline, was shadowed by the brim of a Panama hat. But beneath the brim of any hat Glennister would have recognized him. That cold, barbaric profile could not be mistaken for another. As surprise, resentment, and a sudden bright satisfaction burst into activity, Glennister rushed from the little room and into Drane's rough office.

"He's here—in the town!" he cried. "The man who lifted our horses is downstairs now!"

He flung the words into Drane's face like a challenge, and the impetuousness of his demand drew the bulky sheriff's chair to all fours with a bang. The sheriff himself he drew after him to the window. Below them, in the yellow sunlight stood the car, and the copper-faced man was standing with a foot on the running-board, still talking with the girl.

"That's him!" cried Glennister with his hand on the other's arm. "That's the tall fellow who dug my pony with his spur!"

Drane, having regarded the copper face of the man outside, glanced backward over his shoulder at Appsley. The two men grinned.

"You're crazy," said Drane. "That's Thornet Fulglove. He's the biggest rancher on the Tinto. He's got more hawses than you ever saw. You're seein' things."

Glennister turned upon him with indescribable amazement; then rage.

"Crazy!" he cried. "Crazy!" He detected in the eyes of the two men a certain contemptuous amusement. "I guess not!" he snorted. "I saw that man in the moonlight as plainly as you can see him now; and I couldn't forget that face in a thousand years!"

"Well, you did," said Drane. He turned back to his desk and as he did so, Glennister saw the man below them cross the board walk and enter the store.

"I'll show you how crazy I am," he said. "I'm going to swear out a warrant for this guy Fulglove, and you're going to serve it, see?" He paused for a moment, glaring through narrowed lids at the other's oxlike countenance. "We'll see how crazy I am in a court of law."

Drane grinned up at him.

"Forget it," he said. "You ain't lived out here long enough yet, or you'd know how foolish you talk. Arrest Thornet Fulglove? Oh, hell!" He laughed in Glennister's face.

Glennister stared from one to the other of them. Appsley was laughing too. It seemed to Glennister as though he were surrounded by brick walls. He felt that whatever course he might pursue, brick walls bound him in—brick walls of contempt and indifference: contempt and suspicion of the outlander; indifference to his righteous anger. The clannishness of these people, their jealousy of the intruder, surrounded him like a brick wall and made him helpless. So it seemed to Glennister as he turned his back on Drane's office and took the outer stairs two at a time. He wasn't getting a square deal.

It was his impulse to make directly for the store and have it out with Fulglove face to face; demand the return of his horses and threaten the man with the majesty of the law. It occurred to him in precisely that hackneyed phrase: "the majesty of the law." With that he remembered Drane, gave up the thought of facing Fulglove in the publicity of Mengelburg's store, and grinned. He was advancing toward his car as he grinned, and in that manner was advancing as well toward the girl's car which was behind his own. Still sitting behind her steering-wheel, she was facing him, and as he grinned Glennister became suddenly conscious that she was intently regarding him. She caught his grin and returned it. He bobbed his head toward her as he climbed into his car, and he felt a peculiar sensation of gladness as he started his engine going. He looked back as he threw the car into motion and caught her eye again. She smiled at him quickly, but not more quickly than Glennister smiled himself. He rolled down the street with a momentary forgetfulness of what his purpose was; and was lost for the moment in the assured fact of her existence in this picturesque sunlit world; in the importance of "looking her up." Then he remembered the man who had sat beside her and his cares were on him again.

GLENNISTER remembered his decision against yielding to impulse. He would make that copper-colored horse thief pay him for the humiliation of last night, but he need not hurry. He would take counsel with Cowdray first. Cowdray knew this country and the people. He had better take counsel with Cowdray before he put his foot into it. And he'd have Drane's scalp, too.

Before he drove back to the ranch he stopped in at the bank. He was buying in some state lands adjacent to his own, and must see Mason Maddox about the matter of title. He found Maddox ensconced behind his flat-top desk in all the dignity of the little brass and pine-wood bank. The big Westerner with his sandy beard and rough corduroy clothing seemed absurdly out of place in such a clerical environment, but Glennister had found him as shrewd as a Shylock in his banking and as knowing a cattle-lands lawyer as the range could boast. He looked up as Glennister strode through the little wooden gate which separated Maddox from the counting house, and Glennister experienced again the never-failing sense of the grotesque which accompanied the sight of big Mason Maddox in spectacles.

"Well, how they coming?" Glennister asked bluffly.

Maddox gazed at him with twinkling eyes and a wrinkled forehead.

"Why, now, Mr. Glennister, it ain't comin' to anything to talk of," he said. "I'm afraid we can't get that quarter-section of grass for you at all."

Glennister frowned. The man's greeting was completely unexpected. Glennister had thought the purchase of his land to be proceeding as smoothly as if he'd been buying a pair of shoes.

"What d'you mean?" he asked. "I thought there wasn't anything to it but the shouting."

Maddox twinkled up at him like a bespectacled buccaneer.

"So did I," he admitted cheerfully. "So did I, Mr. Glennister. I shore thought we was sliding along real nice."

"Then what's the matter?"

"Why, Thornet Fulglove, he's just come out from the East, and it seems he's negotiating for that land himself."

Maddox spoke with finality. That Fulglove wanted the land in question seemed to Maddox to decide the matter out of hand. Glennister flared up resentfully.

"Fulglove?" he cried. "Fulglove? Who in hell is Fulglove? What do we care whether he wants the land or not? Tell him to go to the devil! He came in too late!"

Maddox looked up at him, and Glennister was astounded to see in his eyes the same expression of amused pity that in the eyes of Drane had carried the infuriating essence of contempt.

"Yes," soothed Maddox. "Yes, yes. Of course it's right annoying to give up that parcel of grazing, but Fulglove, he's got first call on it."

"How?" Glennister felt inclined to shout that incredible pity out of the other's face. He was amazed that his words came out in a tone so restrained and forceful. "You never let on that the coast wasn't clear before! You never said anything about prior claims a week ago! If Fulglove hadn't got any call on that section last week, he hasn't got any call on it at all!"

"Well now, I'll tell you, Mr. Glennister." Maddox spoke softly, suavely. "You don't just understand how things go, out here. You haven't been in these parts long. Now if I was you I'd just let this sort of slide. It ain't nothing but a section of grass pasture, and it seems like Thornet Fulglove has got things just where he wants them."

Glennister glowered down upon him.

"You mean lay down," he said. "You people all seem to think I'm green. I got to lay down and quit whenever this Fulglove guy says so. You ought to know better than that, Maddox. And if you don't—I'm going to show you!"

Maddox shrugged his shoulders.

"If you mean you're going to fight Fulglove over this claim," he said, "why, just let me give you a tip. Don't! Or anyway, don't start anything till you know the Fulglove crowd a heap better than you do now. That's all."

Glennister stared at him incredulously. These people must all be crazy. He felt as though overtaken by the fantastic eventualities of a dream—a nightmare in which he found himself dashing up open roads only to discover each successive road barricaded with brick. He flung himself out of the bank with a great air of resolution and leaped into his waiting car.

DAVE COWDRAY sat on a table with with legs dangling and spoke wisdom. Glennister sat relaxed in a high-backed rocking-chair and listened. Outside on the ranch-house veranda a group of cowpunchers slouched in various attitudes of after-dinner ease, and Glennister could hear the murmur of their voices and glimpse a tall figure outlined against the queer bright sunlight. Cowdray, with his khaki trousers stuffed into high riding boots, his blue flannel shirt half concealed by an oddly checkered vest, and his strong brown forearms bare to the elbow, spoke with a peculiar effect of tight, scarcely moving lips. His broad-brimmed felt sombrero shadowed his lean face, and altogether he lived up to Glennister's mental specifications of the proper plainsman.

There was his incorrigible imagination at work again! Painting reality with the glamorous colors of a West that was long since dead; seeing a picture of Romance in this gathering of common workingmen—a picture in which he, with his trim homespun clothing, his tennis shirt and neat haberdashery, was a spectator merely.

"This Fulglove, he owns the range, that's how he stands," Cowdray set forth. "You won't ever see no warrant served on him because for the simple reason that Drane is his man. Old Warren Fulglove and Rivers, over at the state capitol, they ran the state machine. Now the old man's dead it's Rivers and Thornet Fulglove that runs it."

"Is he Warren Fulglove's son?"

"No. Adopted. Why?"

"He looks like an Indian."

Cowdray grinned tightly.

"Don't never let him hear you say it," he said. "But you ain't the first that's noticed it. In the old days they used to call old Fulglove a squaw man. Well, he dropped the squaw, but he had the guts to hang on to the boy. There's a girl, too; but she's all regular and right."

Glennister needed no information on that score; he remembered the girl.

"Has this Indian got all the Fulglove property?" he asked quickly.

Cowdray frowned, a little worried.

"Don't be too easy with that word 'Indian,' Mr. Glennister," he said. "Things like that make trouble. Why, yes, the girl's got a share, but I guess she leaves things to him mostly. He's got power."

"But you don't mean to say he's got power to take any stock he likes, and take his pick of state grazing land to boot?"

"Son," said Cowdray, "in these parts Fulglove is boss. Everybody who knows their way around is a friend of Fulglove out here. You're just up against it—that's whatever."

"But I want those horses back, and I'm going to get 'em."

"Best forget it," said the picturesque plainsman. "Seven horses ain't worth the trouble you'll get if you start anything."

"You mean lay down?"

Cowdray grinned.

"Be friends," he amended.

"Like hell I will! You can tell 'em for me, that from now on, I'm gunning for your friend Fulglove. He isn't going to keep those horses, and he isn't going to get that land—because he'll be in jail at the time of the transfer. Drane's going to get a warrant for him, and he's going to serve that warrant."

Cowdray shook his head.

"It ain't no use, Mr. Glennister," he said. "Drane, he'd lose his job first."

"Then I'll take it to the state's attorney."

"FULGLOVE and Rivers, they run the state." To Glennister's dismay, he heard the same tone in Cowdray's voice that had characterized the voices of Drane and Maddox. Cowdray was pitying him. "And the Federal judge," continued Cowdray, "he got his appointment from the machine."

Glennister arose from his chair. So this was the free West of his dreams and expectations! A widespread community bound up in a web of politics as corrupt as a city slum. And to the free Westerner, that web was a matter of course.

"Cowdray," he cried, "I'll fight if it busts me!"

Then a peculiar thing occurred. Into Cowdray's eyes crept a gleam that was the memory of a day that was gone. Into his voice crept a tone that was as low and smooth as the tone cattlemen used before the increasing demands of business demanded a quicker, more strident note.

"There's one way we could do," he murmured.

Glennister was quick to feel the new spirit in the man before him.

"What's that?" he cried.

"Get your warrant, and if Drane don't serve it, ride over and take those hawses back under your guns. If they fight back, it'll make more trouble than they'd want. They wouldn't want to bust up the machine over a matter o' seven hawses."

Glennister stood transfigured with the joy of sheer romance. So there was adventure in the West. There were men who would fight. The prospect brightened.

"Only we couldn't get the men," concluded Cowdray.

"What do you mean? We got men enough right here on the ranch."

"Cowmen, they are, not gunmen," said Cowdray. "This ain't no picnic. What we're talkin' about is war. Fulglove, he'd bring over a herd o' gunmen from the towns. There'd be a sight o' killin' done."

"And d'you mean to say our men would back down?"

"I mean to say they wouldn't even be our men. They'd throw their jobs. They ain't killers."

"Would you be game to hire some that are?"

Cowdray looked straight into Glennister's eyes.

"No," he said. "If it was yesterday, or if it was the old man, it would be different. But I ain't gunnin' for nobody any more. The range ain't like that, these days. The first thing you know they got you fixed up for a term in the pen."

Glennister stared into the man's face with shocked amazement. The silken tone of retrospection had left the cattleman's voice. With a chill disillusionment, Glennister knew that Cowdray, like the others, was caught in the meshes of a law that was not a law; was shackled body and soul by a power which was corrupt, but which was accepted as the inevitable accompaniment of a beneficent democracy.

"All right then," he grinned resolutely. "I'll fight alone."

John Glennister did not fail to obtain his warrant this time. Old Perkins, the Justice of the Peace, had hesitated with a touch of panic when Glennister gave him the name of Thornet Fulglove, but Glennister would have had that warrant if he had had to take it at the point of the gun that made his coat bulge at his side, and Perkins was aware of that. Drane sensed it too, when Glennister, after searching the town for him, approached him in the street.

"There's your warrant for the arrest of Fulglove!" said Glennister. His voice was businesslike and low, but Drane didn't fail to discern the resolution that was in it.

"You must be loco!" he rumbled, taken completely by surprise.

"Sure, loco," agreed Glennister, laughing at him; "so loco that I'm dangerous. If you don't serve that warrant in forty-eight hours, I'm going to ride over with a flock of men and take those horses back myself!"

"Huh?" Drane's slow mind beat the air for time.

"Serve that warrant! And serve it quick!"

It was an unequivocal command, and after rapping it out with contempt and vehemence, Glennister leaped into his car and whisked away. He was going to see Fulglove now.

Drane stood on the sidewalk with the paper in his hand. He stared after the car with his eyes protuberant, his red face aglow. Then, as though moved by a shock of electricity, he turned on his heel, thundered up to his office, and wound the bell of his telephone madly. He called for the Fulglove ranch, and finally heard the flat, limpid voice of Thornet Fulglove at the other end.

"For the love of God give that fool kid back his hawses!" he yelled. "He's given me a warrant to serve, and he's out to raise hell."

The unruffled flatness of the other's voice came back to him with an irritating assurance.

"Why are you so excited? Tell me how he is going to raise this hell you speak of."

"If I don't serve his warrant, he's goin' to come and get those hawses hisself! Then you either lay down or fight, an' if there's a fight there'll be hell to pay! It don't need no more than a range war to split the machine wide open. Give him back his fool hawses or shut him up!"

"Leave it to me," said the flat voice in his ear. "Don't you worry, Drane. You leave it to me." And Drane heard the line switched off.

GLENNISTER stopped at the Curly Arrow Ranch house to tell Cowdray of the move that he had made. He didn't find Cowdray because the foreman was out on the range, and after spending a precious hour and more in an effort to find the man, he continued on his way to the Fulglove place. Cowdray would have to wait and discover his activities when hell started popping. The sun was far over to the west and the eastern hills were already flushed in anticipation of the fiery sunset which was to consume them and leave them ashen gray, when Glennister sped forth on his pugnacious errand.

He swung around the bluff where the ranch trail joined the road with a fleeting memory of the innumerable imaginative battles he had staged upon that background. And now he was bent upon the reality of strife. The white road unwound before him in apathetic witness of the changes that time had wrought upon the range, and the wheels of Glennister's swift car ground it beneath them as its driver sped on to set that change at naught.

He won to the top of an acclivity where the road, sweeping about the shoulder of a broken hilltop, spread forth a panorama of the Fulglove ranch in the valley below him. The ranch was built in a curve of the Tinto River. It was large and had extensive buildings—a feudal manor, as befitted the power of the family that owned it. There were barns and silos and bunk houses, and before them all there was the great ranch house, a palace of wood with lawns made green by water artfully sprayed from pipes that fed upon the river. Shade trees and flower beds were laid out before this amazing ranch house, and within there were all the mechanical conveniences of a city home. Glennister saw it from the hilltop and smiled at the picture. To approach such an establishment on a mission of war and grim contention seemed ludicrous. It was as though he sought to transfigure a New England farm into a field of frontier violence. Then his gaze passed beyond the peaceful ranch to the rough, broken country beyond with the brilliant stream winding through it:

and he knew that he was in the West—where anything might happen.

The valley passed from his sight as he left the hilltop and, gliding down into the hollow on the other side of the hill, he perceived a brown car that lay off the road as though in trouble.

He recognized the car and braked down as he regarded it. The girl who had driven it in the morning was standing beside it. She was watching him. He divined that she had watched him from the moment he had come into sight. He stopped his car and leaped out.

"Good evening, Miss Fulglove," he said.

She stood examining him with brown eyes; she seemed to search him for a cue.

"You're Mr. Glennister?" she asked.

He nodded. "I'm at the Curly Arrow Ranch," he said.

"Are you Mr. Tierney's manager?"

"No. Mr. Tierney is dead. I'm a nephew. He left the ranch to me." He grinned, feeling very conscious of the fact that he came from Pittsburgh. "I'm a tenderfoot," he said.

SHE answered his smile as she had answered it in the street that morning. There seemed to be a ready understanding between them. Then she spoke very seriously.

"I'm practically a tenderfoot, too," she said. "I've never been out here much since I was a little girl, but Thornet—that's my foster brother, you know—he's running my interests here now, and I came out to be—with him." She gazed at him a moment speculatively. "You're having trouble with Thornet, aren't you?"

He jerked up his head.

"A little misunderstanding," he said.

She spoke quickly, almost cutting in upon his words.

"Yes, I know. That's why I came out here to wait for you." She stopped short and moved her hands together in a subdued nervous tension.

"You waited for me!" he cried in surprise.

"Yes. It must sound terribly silly to you. But Thornet—" She seemed at a loss for words. "These men are dangerous!" she blurted out. "You don't understand what conditions are out here. They are dangerous!" Her large brown eyes were fixed upon him without perceptible agitation, but Glennister knew that she was profoundly disturbed.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "You speak like the rest of them. Everybody round here talks of your brother as if they were talking of the sacred host. You don't suppose I'd let him get away with my property, do you?"

She frowned for a moment.

"Thornet's peculiar that way," she said. "You see he has a touch of the Indian in him, and although he's educated and all that, I think he likes adventure. He gets tired of the West as it is today. He wants excitement; so he plays tricks like he did last night."

"But sane people don't rob houses for excitement!" he roared.

"No. But it isn't quite the same. Not out here it isn't. Thornet ran across your horses on his own grazing land. Of course it's hard for you to understand, or for me either." She smiled with a pleasing frankness. "But—he knows you are new to this country. He wanted to show you how small you are; how powerful he is. He's part Indian, you know."

Glennister blazed wrathfully.

"And even seven horses are worth adding to his stock!" he cried.

"But you mustn't anger him!" she cried out in real alarm. "He's dangerous! That's what I wanted to tell you. I wanted to warn you not to anger him!"

Glennister was puzzled.

"Are you telling me to lie down, too?" he cried.

"No—not lie down. But be sensible. Try to understand him. He—he's—he's a half-breed, you know." She blurted it out reluctantly, as though caught in the trap of her own words.

He nodded his head very wisely.

"All right," he said. "I'll remember." Then he smiled, for he wished her to know that he was her friend. "Say, I don't know how I'm going to thank you for taking all this trouble for me. It's mighty fine of you."

She smiled back at him. He liked these smiles and answering smiles that passed between them.

"That's all right," she answered.

It seemed she was not returning home immediately, so he rode away, at her request, leaving her there.

For the highways of the state macadam was good enough; for the road which led from the highway up to the Fulglove ranch, concrete. The tires of Glennister's car whispered on that concrete with a sibilance that had the sinister quality of a hiss. He came hissing past the green lawn, and around the circular driveway to bring up under the porch that crossed the drive with baronial magnificence. There was no one there to greet him, and Glennister divined that despite its portentous grandeur, this house was only a ranch house, and its life was to be found in the rear. So he shut off his engine and walked to the rear of the house. As he turned about the corner of the kitchen wing, he found himself walking directly toward Thornet Fulglove, who was approaching the house from the barns.

Glennister walked on across the line of Fulglove's approach until he reached the kitchen porch. He stood there and watched Fulglove come toward him; and he granted the man the tribute of a grudging admiration as he regarded the trim, tall figure whose stride touched the earth as though on springs. He appeared lithe and sinuous as a cat and the picturesque quality of his copper-hued features was now emphasized by his costume. For the clothes he wore were the working clothes of the range. His shirt was brightly checked with blue and yellow, his sleeveless buckskin vest was worked with beads. From his lean hips fell away wide chaparejos of glistening horsehide, and his high-heeled boots of mahogany leather added inches to his height. His stature was further augmented by a wide-brimmed, peak-crowned felt sombrero that flaunted a band plaited from many-colored horse-hair and furbished with a tassel of bright vermilion. When this splendid figure reached the steps of the kitchen porch, Glennister, who himself was not a short man, found that it towered above him.

"I want to speak to you," he said.

Fulglove smiled. Glennister noticed that the smile was only of the lips, and he noticed, too, the peculiar width of those thin lips, and the wide, straight line of the strong teeth behind them. That wide, narrow jaw, too little curved, was a fault in the rugged face, Glennister thought; but it was a fault which gave the face power.

"I'm Glennister—Glennister, of the Curly Arrow Ranch," he said, and the restrained turbulence in his voice lent it force. "I came over to see you about those horses."

The half-breed betrayed no emotion. His hazel eyes found Glennister's gaze and then dropped. His mouth smiled again as he spoke.

"What horses?" he asked. Again Glennister was surprised by the flat, womanish quality of the man's voice. The tall figure, the dignity of that rugged, aquiline countenance, suggested resonance, a deep, vibrating bass.

"The horses you lifted from our range last night. The seven horses you took over the ford down the river." Glennister was going to have no nonsense.

"You don't talk sense, Mr. Glennister. I know nothing about your horses. You've lost seven horses? Is that it?"

"You stole seven horses, and I want them back."

Fulglove lifted his eyes and looked into Glennister's face again.

"But why should I want your horses?" he grinned. "I have many horses of my own." He dropped his eyes.

This refusal to meet his gaze irritated Glennister. He felt that his words fell unheard as the other gazed stonily upon the steps.

"Hell!" he cried. "You won't find them down there! Look up! I'm talking to you!"

FULGLOVE'S eyes came up in abrupt surprise. He had never been spoken to like that in his life before.

"Now listen, Mr. Fulglove," continued Glennister; and he glared into the other man's face with some heat. "I just want to tell you that last night seven horses were lifted off our range: two whites, a roan, and four bays, all branded with a curly arrow. The two horse thieves"—he emphasized the epithet pointedly—"herded them over the ford of the Tinto River. One of those horse thieves looked as much like you as if he was your twin brother, and it so happened that he wore that hat that you've got on now. I want to tell you that the Curly Arrow outfit is going to get those horses back, and the man I've described is the lad who's going to turn them over. When can I send for them?"

Fulglove augmented the smile of his lips by narrowing his eyes.

"You're mistaken," he said. "How do

you know that the man who took your horses looked like me?"

"I saw him at the ford."

The other man shook his head slowly, kindly, as though correcting a little child.

"If you'd seen him you'd have stopped him," he set forth. But Glennister saw what was expected of him, so he laughed.

"I did," he said. "But he kept right on going. You see, Fulglove, this bird was tricky, like an Indian."

He was amazed at the ferocity of the gleam that entered Fulglove's eyes. The man's copper-hued face filled suddenly with blood, and the blood suffused his eyes. He was seized abruptly by a rage that was the rage of a beast. His right hand dropped to his belt.

"What do you mean?" He almost choked on the words. He obviously controlled himself with an inconceivable effort. "What do you mean?"

"He tricked me, that's what I mean. But I don't know any tricks like that, so I took the commonplace action of turning the matter over to the sheriff. I've sworn out a warrant for your arrest, Fulglove, and if I don't get the horses back tonight, I'll have to see that it's served."

The half-breed was still flushed with resentment. He leaned toward Glennister a little and threw out his hands in a gesture that suggested the Italian.

"What's that to me?" He spoke excitedly. His thin voice was grotesquely akin to the chatter of a squirrel. "There are no horses here belonging to you. They can arrest me but you'll never get the evidence. The case would be dropped." He laughed with startling abruptness.

"Perhaps," said Glennister. "But that won't help you. If the warrant isn't served in twenty-four hours, or the horses returned, I'm coming over here and take them!"

At that Glennister saw Fulglove glance across his shoulder, beyond him. He turned quickly and saw a man standing behind him, a cowpuncher who stood negligently beside the house and fingered the butt of the revolver that he carried at his side. He grinned.

"Don't fool yourself, Fulglove," he cried. "When I come over here for those horses, hell's going to cut loose!"

Fulglove waved a finger toward the gunman.

"If you come back to my house," he chattered, "you'll get yours. I don't let any man call me Indian. People about here will tell you. Now get off my ranch and stay off. Never come back to this place again!"

Glennister smiled with the knowledge that he taunted Fulglove with that smile.

"It's up to you," he grinned. "If you don't want me back, send these stable boys of yours over with the horses, and send 'em quick!"

He felt a certain menace in the air. He divined the savage anger that moved in the half-breed's breast, and knew that if it burst bounds he might not leave that place alive. He made a great effort to betray nothing of his uneasiness.

"Good night," he said, and walked past Fulglove as though he passed a tree. With the absurd feeling of a child traversing black passageways, he walked around the house to his car without once looking back. As he turned from the concrete into the highway once more, he was amazed at the sense of relief which came to him. He was astounded by the knowledge that he had really expected a bullet in his back as he left that peaceful ranch house. The West was not without adventure after all.

HE SPED along the macadamized road, feeling uneasily that while he had uncovered the possibilities of great adventure, Cowdray could not be relied upon to rise to that adventure. If his bluff did not work, if Fulglove didn't yield, he would find himself in the position of a man who has started a war and must fight it all alone. And a range war, he knew well enough, was not a game for a tenderfoot to enter single-handed. Glennister gritted his teeth. Well, he would fight nevertheless. If he had to forfeit every cent he had, his ranch and life itself, or liberty, he would fight Fulglove to the bitter end. They would see that this wide countryside was not so firmly entangled in their web as they had thought.

He stepped on the accelerator with a vicious pressure as he sped about the foot of a hill to take the winding roadway to the top. And at the side of the road, a purple blur in the many-tinted dusk, was the brown car with the girl sitting at the wheel. Glennister pulled up with a lurch that set his wheels to skidding in the road.

"WHAT'S the matter?" he cried to the girl. He got down from his car and went to her.

"Nothing's the matter," she said. "I've been waiting for you."

"Waiting for me?" He was perplexed. Then came an incredible thought. "Not since I passed this way before?"

She nodded. She was regarding him closely, a wise speculative gravity in her eyes. It was as though she were appraising him. The light was mellow and diffused by the reflection of a sunken sun. She appeared to him with the flimsy aspect of a dream.

"I wanted to tell you before," she said, "but it sounded too absurd. It sounded ridiculous. I thought to myself that you wouldn't believe it if I told you. Then, after you'd gone, I knew I should have told you, and I can't tell you how scared I've been that you might have quarreled with him."

He regarded her with complete perplexity.

"What are you talking about?" He affected a humorous, bantering tone; but he divined that she was in earnest.

"Alf Drane telephoned over to Thornet just as soon as he got that warrant," she said, "and Thornet said he'd take care of it. Do you understand what he meant?"

Glennister nodded.

"He meant that he would pay no attention to that warrant whatever. But he can't get away with it!" He was standing with one foot on the running-board of her car, and as she leaned down to speak with him, her face came very close to his. He was thinking how lovely she appeared in the attenuated light of the afterglow rather than of the words he spoke. "It's mighty fine of you to take this interest in the affair," he blurted out. "But you mustn't be scared. There may be some shooting, but I don't think so. I've got to buck him, anyway. I can't let him bluff me, can I?"

She shook her head.

"You don't understand what I want to say," she said. "When he got that phone message from Drane this afternoon, he sent a man over to your ranch; and it was a gunman—a man who kills men for pay!"

"No!" Glennister was dumfounded. A sensation of incredulous fear thrilled through him. "No!" he cried. "He wouldn't!"

"But he would! He would! That man has gone over to your place, and he'll get a job there. Then when Thor—when *he* gives the word, he'll pick a quarrel with you and he'll shoot you. Oh, they're dangerous, boy; they are like animals. They wouldn't stop at anything!" She grasped his arm as she spoke, and clutched it tensely, eagerly.

Glennister remembered the man who had stood behind him at the ranch, and the absurd sensation of danger that had followed him as he went back to the car.

"By Golly!" he cried. "You're right! They'd stop at nothing!" For a moment thoughts raced through his mind; a mad scramble of thoughts from which he strove to pick one that would serve his purpose. He suddenly grasped her hand, and even while he spoke curtly and sharply to her, he was conscious of what a slim, firm little hand it was.

"What's his name—the gunman?" he snapped.

"Morgan," the girl answered. "Tucker Morgan."

"And what does he look like?"

"Like a rat. He's a little, slight man, and his lower jaw runs back. His front teeth project. He looks like a rat."

Still grasping her hand, he looked up into her face and slowly smiled. The smile bubbled into something that resembled a boy's chortle of glee as he spoke to her.

"Good!" he cried.

She caught the contagion of his smile. But there was a fear lurking in her eyes behind it.

"You must be careful!" she cried. "And—oh, can't you stop short of fighting?"

He held her hand very tightly.

"It's up to him," he said. "Good-by. I'm never going to forget how you waited for me tonight." He turned away to his car, but before he was in his seat he heard the engine of the brown car throb.

"Good-by," she cried; and she was off into the afterglow to return to the ranch from which he had just come.

HE SWEPT back to the ranch in an exuberance of speed. He didn't notice that he passed the bluff at the turn of the trail without a thought of its possible material for vicarious romance. And he was unconscious of the glory which a departed sun left upon the sky above the western hills. He was occupied with only one consideration and that was the immediate demand for action.

"It's your move," his copper-hued opponent had said. And so it was. He must make a move, any move; but it must be quick, daring. The adventure was upon him.

He whirled up to the ranch in a cloud of dust and leaped from the car to confront Cowdray as he emerged from the office shanty, which, painted white, was now purple and gold in the sunset. But Glennister had no eyes for that.

"Taken on a new man today, Dave?" he sang out.

Cowdray stopped short. Glennister had never shown such an interest in the ranch before.

"Yeh. A puncher rode in today an' I took him on. He don't promise much but we're sort of short-handed."

"Sure." Glennister nodded brightly. "Name of Morgan—Tucker Morgan," he said.

"That's right."

"One of Fulglove's gunmen!" Glennister flung the information like a bomb, and like a bomb it exploded upon Cowdray and confounded him.

"I've sworn out a warrant for Fulglove, and promised to come over and take those ponies by force if it ain't served. He's gunning for me, and sent over this Morgan to do the job."

Cowdray stood staring at him without words. Glennister felt for the first time that at the Curly Arrow Ranch he was boss.

"What you gona do?" drawled Cowdray.

Glennister grinned at him.

"Where is this Morgan?" he asked.

"Over at the bunk house."

"All right. We'll go over and get him." He saw the doubt on Cowdray's face and delighted in it. "We'll cover him and ask him a few questions," he explained. "Then we'll truss him up and take him right back to Fulglove. If Fulglove doesn't come across then, we'll carry Morgan to the sheriff and make a case of it."

Cowdray obviously clung to his doubts.

"Come on!" cried Glennister. "Bring your gun and a rope!"

Cowdray obeyed. He seemed suddenly sprung with action. He leaped into the office shanty and brought forth gun and rope. Then he strode so quickly to the bunk house that Glennister had difficulty gaining a place at his elbow as he pushed open the door and entered. There were a half-dozen cowpunchers in the room when they burst in, but so apt had been the girl's description that Glennister had no need to wait for Cowdray's cue to pick out the rat-faced recruit who was Fulglove's gunman. He had pulled his gun from his pocket before he entered the bunk house, and both Cowdray and he covered Morgan the moment the door was open. Of the six cattlemen within, Morgan alone automatically threw his arms aloft.

"All right, boys," Cowdray reassured the others. "We just want the little stranger here." He strode to Morgan's side and while he thrust his gun against the man's body he frisked him, taking an automatic from his hip pocket and a knife from his belt.

"What's the game?" Morgan hissed the words through his teeth into Cowdray's face. In conversation he affected a startling series of growls and hisses to circumvent a natural tendency to lisp, which he conceived to be unworthy of his estate.

"All up; that's what the game is," snapped Glennister. "Fulglove told me that when you picked a fight with me, I'd die; so I thought I'd pick the fight first."

A THIN flame of rage flickered in Morgan's eye.

"Fulglove's a fool. I thought he could keep his mouth shut. He's a hell of a guy to work for!"

"Remember that, boys!" cried the delighted Glennister. "Remember that this man confesses he was hired by Fulglove to pick a fight with me that would end in a shooting."

"Aw, what're you going to do about it?" Morgan leered like a coyote at bay.

"Show him, Dave." Glennister nodded to Cowdray.

"Grab him, boys!" Cowdray pounced on the rat-faced man as two others pinioned his arms. When Morgan saw the rope he feared the worst and his curses arose to a wail of bitter anguish. Cowdray plied the rope with a deft hand, however, and in a surprisingly brief time the gunman was lying outstretched on the floor, completely trussed.

"And now we must take him home," said Glennister.

"Take a load of the boys with us?" asked Cowdray. He had found a new respect for the tall young tenderfoot who was his boss.

"No. It'll make trouble. They won't start anything against just two of us. You and me, come on."

With the trussed form of Morgan at his feet, Cowdray sat in the back of the car and prayed that tires, wheels and steering gear might stand the strain of Glennister's mad speed. A horseman of reckless daring, Cowdray could never bring himself to a proper faith in wheels and gears and bearings.

THE Fulglove ranch was bathed in the luminous darkness of the evening when Glennister's car rolled up. He didn't go to the back of the house, but, having taken upon his shoulder the hostage of war, and instructed Cowdray to sit at the wheel of the car and be ready to drive away on an instant's notice, he strode firmly up the broad steps beneath the porte-cochère, and tapped with his knuckles against the decorative glass panel of the front door. The door was opened and Glennister saw the girl standing before him. She did not seem surprised at his appearance with this alarming burden; she did not seem disturbed. She looked at him with the same grave, speculative glance with which she had regarded him on the highroad.

"Where's Mr. Fulglove?" He spoke clearly and smiled.

To his left as he entered the house he saw the living-room through wide-open doors. It was lit with softly shaded lamps, and in the diffused light lurked the unmistakable figure of Fulglove, clad in his checked suit.

She had answered his smile, and indicated Fulglove with a nod. He passed her in the hallway, strode into the living-room and cast his burden unceremoniously at Fulglove's feet. The girl followed and stood inside the doorway.

"There he is," he said. "We couldn't use him, so I'm returning him to you."

Fulglove gazed upon him with smoldering eyes.

"Who is this?" he asked. Again Glennister was surprised by his flat voice, the shrewish tone of it.

"You know!" he said. "Tucker Morgan, your gunman."

"I never saw the man before."

"You just didn't expect him back so soon. I happen to know you sent him over to pick a fight with me if the need arose. All I can say is, don't send too many. My car can only carry seven at a time."

Suddenly the other's voice rose in shrill anger.

"I told you to stay away from my house! And you come back with these lies!"

"Six of my men can bear witness to Morgan's confession that he's your hired gunman."

"He lied!"

"It's me who'd be lying if I hadn't got wise before you used him. I'd be lying dead."

He glanced over at the girl, who stood listening with a face white as death but with a calm courage in her eyes. She smiled a quick smile at him. He answered her. Fulglove saw Glennister smile and his smoldering eyes passed from one to the other of them. Suddenly, like a cat, he strode across to her.

"It was you!" he cried. "You told him!"

He seized her by the arm and his eyes gleamed savagely into her face.

"No! Don't, Thornet! Don't touch me!" she cried. "*Don't!* You hurt me!"

Glennister leaped across the room.

"Take your hands off her, you damned half-breed!" he cried.

The Indian turned from the girl, convulsed with fury at the taunt. He flew at Glennister and with his open palm slapped him across the mouth. Glennister recoiled for an instant and then, plunging forward, smashed at the man with all his weight and sinew.

He waded into Fulglove with skill. The balance upon which he poised the weight behind his blows was from long practice, instinctive. His long arms moved like automata, and they were strong. That slap in the face had brought the blood to his head. He saw red; he thirsted for murder; he strove mightily to bash and batter that copper face with his naked fists. And Fulglove retreated from him. He retreated with a horrible, ludicrous terror of Glennister's blows. He tried to fend off the other's fury with his two arms crossed before him, his hands unclenched, his fingers curled up, palms out.

Glennister's lips curled in pleasure at the sight of Fulglove's incapacity to use his fists. He pressed forward, always seeking to batter that face which, no longer austere, was now distorted with the furtive fury of an animal entrapped.

SUDDENLY rallying, Fulglove surged forward and with open palms shoved Glennister away. Glennister was surprised at the force in the man's long arms. He went backward, bringing up against a table that went over and left him tottering for balance.

Fulglove reached instinctively for his hip pocket, but there was no gun there. He leaped for a cabinet in a corner, and as he did so he screamed out, chattering like a monkey.

"You called me half-breed! I'll kill you! I'll kill you for that, you pig!"

The girl stood in the doorway of the living-room, watching them with a calm that had to do with a paralysis of doubt and fear.

"He's after a gun!" she cried in warning, and Glennister leaped upon Fulgove, seized him by the back of his collar, hurled him back and smashed home with his fist upon the copper-colored face.

A stream of curses spilled from Fulglove's lips, but Glennister smashed them back into his mouth with a blow that loosened teeth and brought blood to the half-breed's lips.

With a peculiar, shrill scream, Fulglove closed in and Glennister saw an extraordinary ferocity in the man's eyes. It was the ferocity of an untamed savage, and the scream had been a war cry.

The long arms of the savage were about him now, the strong hands clawed at his throat, his eyes. He beat at Fulglove's face and body, tore the hands from his throat, dashed back the jaws that sought to tear, wolflike, with strong teeth. As he struggled, Glennister saw a man enter the hall from the back of the house, and he saw the girl turn to the newcomer. Quick glimpses these, fragmentary pictures, and yet he knew the girl was talking to this man. Ordering him back to the kitchen, he guessed.

He hurled Fulglove away from him, striking him between the eyes so that he reeled backward, stumbling and groping with a bleeding face and blind eyes. As Glennister saw Fulglove go back, he saw the newcomer push the girl aside and whip out a gun. The gun went off with a loud explosion, but the girl had grasped the gunman's arm and forced it downward.

Glennister heard the bullet splinter the floor at his feet as he leaped forward and blindly, instinctively smashed at the man with the gun. Yet a fleeting moment of vision cleared his brain as he struck. Very vividly he saw for that instant the man's face before him, and he saw and calculated the spot to strike, the weight of the blow that was needed. His fist struck home with a sharp thud. The man's head clicked sharply back, then he fell forward on his face; but he had not hit the floor before Glennister had wheeled to meet the oncoming Fulglove once more.

As Fulglove came plunging toward him with the face of a maniac and long arms clutching at the air, Cowdray started thundering at the door.

The girl had stood before the door from the kitchen in a dilemma that paralyzed her, motionless above the fallen gunman. She held in her hand the revolver he had used and debated in her mind the terrible possibility of having to hold that passageway against all the men of the ranch. When Cowdray beat upon the door she crossed to it and threw it open. Cowdray entered, gun in hand, and as he did so Fulglove's ranch hands thronged in through the kitchen door.

There might have been gun play then, but Fulglove was hanging upon Glennister like a beaten slave, fending off blows which he could not return: powerless to drag Glennister to the floor, knowing himself a beaten man, and yet from some echo of the past forbidden by a savage pride to yield. And the girl herself was close to Cowdray. She crossed the room with him as Glennister strove to thrust his opponent from him.

"Go back, boys!" she cried. "You can't do anything here! Go back!"

She was deathly frightened lest they shoot Glennister down. But they dashed forward and Cowdray saw that the few guns they carried were not drawn. They were simply ranch hands and they sought to separate the fighting men. They seized

Fulglove and Glennister with strong arms. They tore the fighting men apart, and as Glennister yielded to them with Cowdray's hands upon his arm, he saw Fulglove fall limply among the men who dragged him back.

GLENNISTER was amazed at the punishment he had wrought. He had seen men beaten before; had himself taken punishment in his time. But the half-breed's splendid copper-hued face was bruised and swollen, abrazed and beaten out of all recognition. He had fought like a savage with open hands, and his open hands had been strong to clutch and tear. But they had not withstood the terrible battering of Glennister's trained fists, and the young man sprang forward with quick solicitude to help his beaten foe.

He took water from the hands of the girl who brought it to him and, wetting a handkerchief, he laved the half-breed's face with an odd tenderness. She watched him, with a little smile playing about her lips.

Fulglove, who had not lost consciousness, watched him, too; watched him with unmoving serious brown eyes.

"Well," he said abruptly, "you fight like a white man." He smiled. His flat voice was cold and impassive.

"You ought to go in for some boxing," said Glennister cheerfully. "You could lick me with a few lessons, you know. You've got weight and reach."

Fulglove still gazed at him. He had been half reclining in a rocking-chair with a group of his men about him. He arose and drew a deep breath.

"I'd like to," he said.

The gunman who had so unceremoniously been dispensed with was on his feet now, and among the company. He stood, sullen and sheepish, in the background. Fulglove saw him.

"I'm sorry we were interrupted," he said with a peculiar effect of grave courtesy. "I am perhaps at fault in thinking it necessary to have a—bodyguard. We deal with strange people sometimes."

Suddenly his manner changed. He lost the affectation of his irony and turned upon Glennister with a peculiar light in his eyes.

"Have you got a gun?" he asked.

Taken completely by surprise, Glennister assented. It was as though the other had asked abruptly for a match.

"Yes," he said, and took his revolver from his pocket.

Fulglove looked at him with burning admiration in his bruised face.

"By the Virgin!" he said with a deeper tone than Glennister had heard in his voice before. "My friend, you are a man!" He held out his hand. "If I'd had a gun, I'd have shot you to hell!" he said.

Glennister shook hands with him. It was a momentous occasion.

"Well," said Glennister, "it's been a pleasant evening."

Glennister found himself under the porte-cochère. Cowdray was in the car and Fulglove was beside him receiving from him certain directions concerning the delivery of horses. Glennister stood at the top of the steps. He was saying good night to a girl.

"I shall be over tomorrow," he said. "I am taking up some state lands. I told Thornet I'd come over to dinner."

"That will be fine," she said.

There was a silence between them. He was conscious of the queer brilliance of the moon outside. He remembered the night before.

"I must be going. I didn't get much sleep last night," he said.

"Then we'll see you tomorrow."

He ransacked his mind for something more to say. Of course, he should have remembered.

"We owe everything to you," he blurted out suddenly. "It was a fine, courageous thing for you to do, waiting for me in the road."

She smiled. "It was the only thing to do," she said. "I was afraid—" She stopped.

"Of what?"

"Of trouble. "Good night."

"Good night," he answered her.

He drove homeward with a secret pleasure in his heart. For he divined in the self-sure spirit of his youth that the words she had hesitated to say were words that were for him alone to know. "I was afraid for you!" she would have said.

"For me! For me!" he chuckled in his mind. "She was afraid of trouble for me!"

And as he passed the bluff that overhung the turning of the trail he indulged in a transitory image of himself doing heroic combat there against a host of foemen. For his adventure was over now and he could once more possess the pictures of romance.

His Son's Dad

"Play Safe and You Can't Lose." Does the Coach's Theory Hold Good Off the Gridiron?

By Jonathan Brooks

Illustration by John R. Neill

LINES written in acid do not soon wear off. Sulphuric burns deep. David Emerson therefore remembered the picture well, and the twenty-odd years that had passed held only the merest diaphanous veil between him and the day when that bitter photograph had etched its caustic lines upon his senses, to eat and smolder their way down to his very heart and soul. . . .

Young Davy Emerson stood on the ten-yard line, squarely in front of the goal posts and watched the scrimmage before him in midfield. Thursday's full-dress rehearsal for the last game of the season rioted across the gridiron. Coach Mason, a great hulk of a slave-driver, ranted and swore, yelled and fumed at the Varsity for the thousand and one mistakes it committed before his very eyes. And why not? Young Davy Emerson could see, from where he stood, that conditions were enough to try the soul of a saint, whereas Coach Mason was much more susceptible than any martyr listed in the book.

"You, *you*, tackles!" he could hear Mason yelling. "Why don't yuh go *in*, hard and fast? Waitin' for the play to come *out* to yuh?"

Young Davy Emerson, shivering apart, wrapped in a hazy, dreaming ambition all his own, sympathized with the coach. The Varsity had only just now begun to find itself after a season of doubtful ups and disappointing downs. Material was plentiful, and coaching strategy abounded, but the Varsity had floundered here and there through a sick and sad season. Twelve days before, on a bright Saturday afternoon, the Varsity had shown promise of great power, only to collapse as usual.

Ten days before, a raw, rainy Monday, inspiration forced its way through Coach Mason's big black head, and hope for the Varsity was born again. Davy Emerson remembered the scene vividly. Coach Mason was dressing down the woebegone Varsity in his own inimitable way, with the scrubs listening.

"Coach!" spoke up lean Jim Avery, captain of last year's Varsity and now assistant coach in charge of the second eleven.

"Wait a minute, Jim," replied Mason brusquely. "Now, then, you fellows, get this: I'm gona see some football outa you boys today and t'morruh, or by all that's holy, I'm gona take the scrubs and make a Varsity outa *them*. Get that? All right, let's go."

"Coach," said Jim Avery again, "I'd like to talk to you a minute."

What Avery had said, Davy Emerson did not know, but he recalled with a thrill that after the whispered conference Coach Mason had wigwagged to him and called his name sharply:

"You, Emerson, c'm'ere," he said. And when the boy had approached, his knees shaking as hard as his eyes were shining in anticipation: "Avery says you get as much action outa the scrubs as a horsefly gets outa the old mare. Been runnin' the scrubs three years, hey? Know the signals, and all that?"

"Yes, sir," Emerson replied, modestly enough.

"All right," boomed the coach. "I'm gona stick yuh in the Varsity's ear. Bite 'em, see? Sting 'em. Burn 'em up, anything to get some life into 'em. Get in there, now, at quarter, and let's see what y've got. Boys," he addressed the Varsity, "the rest of yuh line up as we started Saturday. Mebbe this kid's got what we need."

Emerson knew then, as he knew now, standing on the ten-yard line in front of the goal posts, that he had just exactly what the Varsity needed. He realized he could not run, nor kick, nor tackle as well as some others, and he felt no particular pride in his judgment of plays. But he did know that somehow he had always kept the scrubs on the jump, had had them fighting for every inch of ground, and going forward until every ounce of strength was exhausted. He lined up at quarter, and in five minutes had the great and powerful, but hitherto lifeless, Varsity, driving and snapping into signals as it had never done before.

"Not too fast, not *too* fast," Coach warned, inwardly gloating over the discovery of the necessary spark to fire his stubborn eleven. "Keep 'em on their toes, kid, but *not* offa balance, see?"

DAY after day Emerson held his post at quarter, and daily the Varsity looked better. The forwards charged not merely because the ball had been snapped, but because somebody was behind them stepping on their heels. The ends went down with drive, and the backs snapped into things with a fight and precision that Varsity play had lacked all season. The boy dreamed and exulted. Here was his chance, in his hands after three years of long, rough waiting. Coach Mason outwardly raved, but inwardly swore that here, at last, was salvation. He had a quarter who could drive, could rip and tear and weld the fabric of his Varsity into a winning, grinding combination. Even if he had to pick him up in the form of a poor little, one-hundred-and-forty-five-pound rascal from the tattered and despised scrubs.

The Varsity looked good. All the campus knew it. All the football world knew it. And finally, Michigan, great point-a-minute Michigan, powerful and self-reliant giant of the lakes, knew it and worried thereat. All these things Coach Mason knew, as he fussed and stormed at the Varsity there on Thursday, in the last full-dress rehearsal, polishing up and repolishing some of his many long-established plans and principles. Coach could not abide infraction of his firmly set rules. All these things, too, young Davy Emerson knew and remembered.

"My chance, and against Michigan," mused the boy, dreaming there on the ten-yard line, while scrimmage with the scrubs, the Varsity and Coach Mason raged in midfield. How would it feel to tackle Willie Heston? They said he was as fast as Joe Patchen, and heavy as a steam roller.

"Emerson! Oh, Emerson!" he vaguely heard Coach Mason calling. He looked up sharply. "They're kicking, now. Last down. All right?"

He nodded. The situation was simple. Varsity and scrubs had locked horns in midfield, and were on the left side of the gridiron, near the sidelines. He stood in front of the goal posts. A half-back came down to the corner of the field, at his left, to reinforce him. A punt was coming. He knew why Coach had yelled at him. Coach Mason was a stickler on punts. Any punt that would go over the goal line on the fly, bound or roll, should be permitted to go over. Then it could be brought out, and put in play again at the twenty-yard line. Sure! Young Davy Emerson knew that most sacred of all Mason's rules as well as he knew that he would rather start the game against Michigan Saturday than receive his diploma. Safety stuff, and good stuff. A fumble, a tackle or a stumble inside the twenty-yard line meant disaster. But letting the ball roll meant play at the twenty-yard line. Anybody could remember that, but Coach was a good guy to give him the hint. Coach was pulling for him, wanted him to make good. Good old Coach!

The Varsity and the scrubs lined up. The signal came barking down to him, and the ball shot back from center to the kicker. He could see the ball as it hurtled back, above the shoulders of the struggling linemen. And he could see—by George, there was two-thirds of the great wide gridiron open to him! He hadn't thought of that. If the kick should come to him in such a way that he could run . . .

Tunk! went the ball against the kicker's instep, and here it came on the wing. As if he had been a second baseman awaiting a shot from the catcher to nip a runner stealing, the pigskin came slipping and twirling, straight into his hands. And there was the wide two-thirds of the field open in front of him. Not a man from the scrubs had broken through. Both ends were blocked, and the halves had been cut down. Not a lineman had been able to pierce the Varsity wall.

"I'll do it," decided young Davy Emerson in a flash of inspiration, and quickly set to snatch the ball. Visions of a run-back to midfield gave him the thrill that only a quarter-back knows.

"Davy, Davy, *Davy!*"

He heard a wild shrieking and yelling from his left and, startled, took his eye off the ball for an instant. The half-back came tearing over on the run to make him let the punt alone.

"Let 'er go, let er go!" screamed the half-back.

It was too late. Emerson turned his attention back to the leather just as it struck his hands. His heart sank. For the ball bounded out of his lagging grasp, to bounce and roll five yards away from him. Dismayed, but resolved still to make the most of his chance, the boy pounced on the ball, snatched it up, and was off on the run to the right, up the field. To the fifteen-yard line, past the twenty, on to the thirty, he fled, always bearing to the right, for scrub tacklers were after him now, cutting across the field to intercept his progress. One, he straight-armed. Another, he dodged. To the forty-yard line. But at the forty-five-yard line, two scrub linemen bore him down.

"Twenty-five yards better off than if I'd let it go, and put it in play at the twenty," he told himself, rejoicing that he had retrieved a bad situation.

"All right, Varsity," he yelled, aloud. "Let's go! Eighteen, forty-nine—"

And then he heard that terrible, raucous and sarcastic voice of the bulking Coach Mason.

"Wait, *wait*, Emerson!" Mason shouted. "C'mon outa there. Did yuh think yuh were still callin' signals for the Varsity, after *that?*"

Dumbly, his heart standing still, he looked around at the coach.

"You're through," said Coach Mason, white with anger. "No more. I thought I had a quarter-back. Any baby could 'a' remembered 'at rule. Here, White," he called, turning to the sidelines, "s'pose you come in here at quarter and see if yuh can remember how many two and two make."

There is no appeal from a decision of the Supreme Court, and less than none from a decision by a head coach. In him is vested all the law, with power to enforce it as he sees fit. He can even, if he likes, make horrible examples of the culprits he sees before him. Wherefore Coach Mason lined up the two elevens identically as they had been, stationed White before the goal posts, and ordered the scrubs to kick. White let the ball roll over the goal line, in due conformity with the law and its maker's wishes.

But little Davy Emerson saw none of this. When a boy is lying on the sideline with his face in his hands, crying until his tears soak the grass, he cannot see what is taking place on the gridiron. Three years of work, ten days of promise, an instant's vision of a brilliant play to convince the coach he was entitled to start against Michigan, great Michigan—all these were snuffed out between snapping fingers. His star was slag. Long after the Varsity dragged its weary weight to the showers, little Davy Emerson lay there on the sidelines.

Varsity played Michigan before a wonderful assemblage, and held the strong Wolverines to a scoreless tie. It held vaunted Michigan, but lacked the drive to produce a score of its own. And Davy Emerson no longer speculated as to how it would feel to tackle Willie Heston.

ACID-WRITTEN memories take much erasure. David Emerson broke under the disappointment, and broke badly. His mingled confession and plea for faith to the girl he loved brought some relief, for she upheld him. More, she reproved him for his lack of confidence in his own judgment. Her sympathy dimmed the lines of the bitter recollection somewhat, and her faith gave him hope. He left the University without waiting for graduation. A year later, he and the girl married. In five years they were wayfarers over the face of the earth. In ten, he had made a fortune and lost it, winning in a mine engineering proposal and losing in another. In fifteen, he had made another, and lost that in the same way, holding only a competence out of the means that had been his.

But always David Emerson followed his own judgment. He knew his way by instinct, but not by rote, and he had the courage to heed his instinct. Safe and sane retainers as engineering consultant for great corporations left him cold. Never, in his downs, did he regret his course. Never, in his ups, did he forget that once, and once only had he been forced to pay a penalty against his will. His own fight, and his own making of it. That was David Emerson. When he lost, he paid without questioning the reckoning—gladly.

New York and London had known him, and Australia and South America. His name was respected throughout the world wherever great construction engineers met. Sometimes he and his family, the wife and one son, lived as gipsies live. Sometimes they fared royally. Whatever their circumstances they felt no such emotion as regret, and neither their hearts nor their lips knew lament. Only the one bitter memory clung to David Emerson.

Across the world, whenever other engineers said that unprofessional, chicken-hearted word, "can't," David Emerson's name was always mentioned. To such a man, great enterprises were entrusted, upon his own terms, because he had never admitted defeat. Engineering ingenuity and native courage carried him past points where other men read failure. He could take a chance, where rule and precedent stopped his fellows.

Twenty years from the November in which he did not play against mighty Michigan, David Emerson was in Rome. An important international banking syndicate had summoned him from China to consider a forlorn engineering hope. Three great governments wanted, demanded, a trans-African railway through territory scarcely explored. Half a dozen geniuses had refused the task. Impossible, they said; inhuman. Sand, jungle, mountains, swamps, malaria—it could not be done.

"It can be done," said David Emerson.

"Very well, when can you start to work?"

"That is another question," David Emerson replied. "I did not say I would undertake the job."

For the first time in his life he hesitated before a thing he wished to do. Fame and fortune if he succeeded. Poverty, perhaps, for his loved ones if he lost. It was a ten-year job at best, a lifetime task at its worst. Did he have ten years? Certainly he had not a lifetime to give. Young Davy was in the University back in America. His wife, the girl, wanted a home. He had a moderate income to carry them the rest of their days if he refused to risk it. "But it can't be done," those other engineers had declared. David Emerson was sorely tried.

"David," said Martha Emerson, on a late October morning, "let's go home."

"What do you mean, 'home'?" he asked, smiling wanly.

"Home is where Davy is," she said.

"But I've got this railroad commission to decide," said David Emerson. "They've asked for an answer within three weeks."

"Let them wait!" she exclaimed impulsively. "They know they've no other engineer to ask. And you can cable them your decision."

Emerson pondered for a moment, at the same time carefully studying his wife. She looked tired. Or was it that she seemed like a traveler on an endless journey with an unknown destination?

"All right," he said decisively. "When can we start?"

"I've looked up the boats," his wife answered eagerly, "and we could sail tomorrow evening. We could reach Davy before Thanksgiving."

"I'll help you pack," said David Emerson.

Eighteen days of travel failed to find an answer to his own mental turmoil, and he, in turn, could not fathom a decision for the railroad syndicate.

"DID YOU realize, girl," asked David Emerson, turning to his wife as they sat high in the bleachers on University Field, "that this is the first time we have been back to the University? Twenty years, and the campus has forgotten us."

"And I suppose that if it had not been for Davy, we never should have come back," she replied.

"Yes. And I'll be glad to see him play," said Emerson. "Football lost its appeal for me years ago, and I've never seen a game since I left school," he added, with a tinge of bitterness. "Took us three weeks to get here, but—"

"But we're glad to be back," she declared, smiling. "To see Davy. You know, David, for the first time since we started out as vagabonds, twenty years ago, I'm tempted to settle down. Can we afford it? Couldn't we make our home here, at least until Davy finishes school? He's going to be a man one of these days, and—"

"He's a man now," declared David Emerson stoutly, eager to change the subject. He did not wish to mingle football and business. "And he'll prove it, in a little while. Look, girl—there comes Michigan!"

He stood up suddenly, with a thrill akin to that he had reveled in twenty years before, to watch the Maize and Blue army drive out upon Varsity field. A roar of greeting and welcome went up from the University stands to be answered an instant later by a tumult of mingled appreciation and defiance from the Michigan side. As the great outburst died down into desultory cheering, and the Michigan eleven lined up on the gridiron for signal practice and warming-up exercise, another, far greater uproar leaped from the University stands. Varsity's orange and black had shown in line, coming down the hill from the gym, over back of the Michigan stands. By the time the Varsity captain had found his way through the crowds to the field and led his men out to the chalk-lined gridiron, an uproar was in progress such as must have reminded the clouds above of wild mountain thunderstorms they had known. It was deafening.

"Look, David, look!" exclaimed David Emerson's wife, excitedly. But her voice was drowned. She clutched his sleeve and when he turned to her, pointed down to the field. He knew what she meant.

"Yes, there he is," he shouted, grinning. "And he might almost be his own dad, girl. That's the way I looked. And by George, I wish I could play this game for him!"

She reached for his hand, and pressed his fingers within her own, for she knew his thoughts. The noise died down momentarily.

"As if *you* could play the game as well as he will," she laughed, in mock scorn.

He answered her mood and put his recollections aside. From that moment his thought was of the Varsity, its chances with the great and mighty Michigan eleven, and of the part Davy, his boy, should play. Davy was a sophomore, had starred on the freshman eleven, and made the Varsity his first eligible year. No long struggle upward from the scrubs for Davy Emerson, *this* Davy. He wondered what Davy had that he himself had lacked, years before, and as the Varsity ran through signals strove to discover it. Letters from the boy had said he did not punt or drop-kick, although he called signals and ran the team. Played safety, he had said, because the coach thought him a sure tackler, and a good man running back kicks. But then, these had been his own qualities, surely.

Of course the game was different now. Ten yards in four downs, instead of five in three. And they threw the ball in addition to carrying it. Somewhere he had heard of these changes. There must be others. But he could detect no great difference when the Varsity lined up and snapped into each maneuver as young Davy, there on the field, called signals. Snapped—that was it.

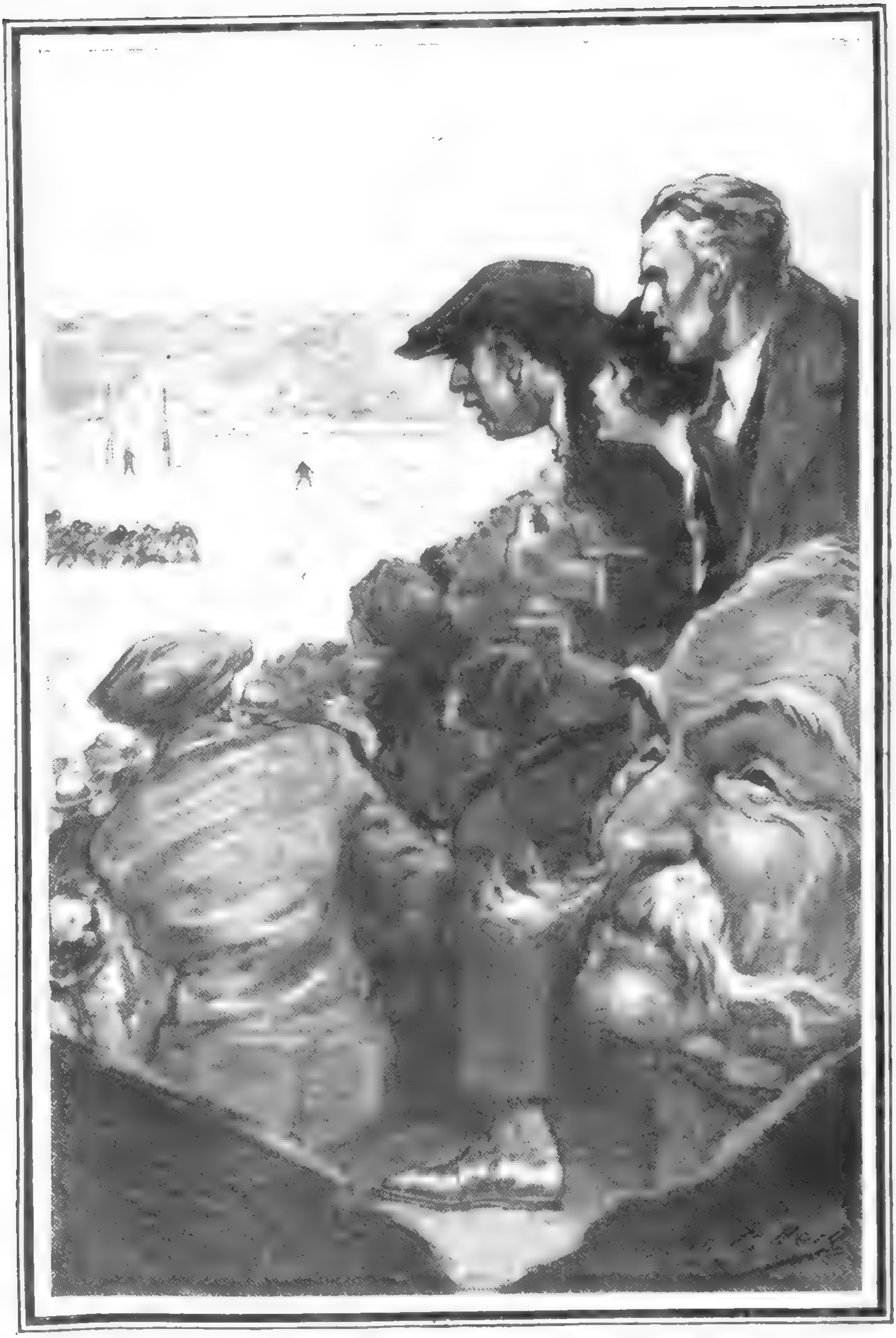
"He's got it, Martha!" exclaimed David Emerson, in some excitement. "The boy whips and snaps that team around as a boy plays with a blacksnake. He cracks that Varsity, and lashes it up and down the field. *That's* the way a quarter should handle a team."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she said, her eyes following her son through complicated formations.

"Oh, well, all right," he said. "But that's the way I wanted to run the Varsity, myself. Wonder if he'll have to tackle Heston," he mused, then laughed. Heston was probably as far from football as he himself was by now.

ALL the usual formalities—a tame word for the events leading up to a great gridiron battle—were followed. Officials conferred, captains were called, a coin was tossed. Rival yell leaders exhorted their howling hosts. Bands blared defiance at each other and the world at large. The big game was ready to start. But just as Emerson, his boy's mother and the throngs about them were marshaling their breath and getting set for the whistle, there was a slight commotion.

An usher came up the stands, threading his way in search of a seat. Behind him climbed a big, hulking figure of a man, somewhat overdressed in a greatcoat with a cap



"Poor play, there," growled Mason. "Oughta play it safe. Pass too risky."

to match. A diamond flashed from his tie, and brightly polished yellow shoes called attention to his big feet. His face was a bright pink, but his hair was gray. That man had a familiar air. Who could he be, David Emerson asked himself. The usher, consulting his seat check, and studying the location, found the newcomer's place beside Mrs. Emerson, on the other side of her from her husband. Panting, the big fellow sat down. David Emerson gave him a sidelong glance, still puzzling over the man's identity. Had he met the man somewhere in his engineering work? Engineering? What should he cable the syndicate in Rome?

A shrill whistle from the field jerked his attention back to the football game and he relegated the big man to subconsciousness. The game was on!

MICHIGAN kicked off, high up and far away. The ball floated and tumbled, by turns, describing a great arc, to hurtle at last earthward directly in front of the goal posts to—to young Davy Emerson, camped there awaiting it! David Emerson caught his breath, and the boy's mother clutched his arm nervously.

"David, David!" she whispered. "He'll be hurt. Look at those big Michigan men going after him!"

"No, he won't get hurt," growled David Emerson, intent upon the play and stifling his own nervousness. "But if he does, it won't hurt." He had to laugh at his own paradox. "But look, Martha! He's got the right idea. Good engineer, that boy. Knows a straight line's the shortest distance between two points. Way to build a railroad. Look, look!"

But he did not need thus to adjure young Davy Emerson's mother to look. She was staring hard at the field, and almost straining off her feet. Davy, disdaining the old-fashioned sweep around the end after receiving the kick-off, was thrusting and knifing his way straight up the field. Dashing past the slower full-back, in front of him, he charged headlong into the midst of the fighting, scrambling Wolverines, to dodge, twist and squirm finally to the thirty-five-yard line before he was dragged to earth.

Varsity stands lifted twenty thousand voices to acclaim his startling, brilliant dash, but before the echoes had settled, young Davy Emerson had jumped to his feet and was barking a staccato signal. Varsity flipped into formation, snapped and charged. Six yards on an off-tackle play. Another signal. Varsity whipped into it, met and held mighty Michigan, standing stanch while a Varsity back got off a long twisting spiral.

"Punting on second down after a good gain!" exclaimed David Emerson. "When they'd expect another try for ground! Smart stuff."

His enthusiasm knew no bounds, but his pride outran it. Unable to contain himself, and seeking some more appreciative sympathy than his wife's meager knowledge of football permitted, he leaned past her, put out a hand and touched the big man's arm.

"That," he said, significantly jerking a thumb in the direction of the field, "is the way to play quarter-back!"

The big man's pink and heavily jowled face turned toward him. Then David Emerson almost fainted. The overdressed giant was old Coach Mason, so much changed he had not at first been able to recognize him. Would Mason remember him, Emerson asked himself. He had not seen the coach since that last day on the gridiron, before another Michigan game, twenty years back. The big man's words dispelled his embarrassment.

"Yeah?" he grunted, heavily. "I'd rather see 'em run a team safe and sane. Takin' smart chances loses football games."

He glanced at Emerson momentarily, and then swung his big head back to keep his eyes on the game. And for the second time, just as he had done twenty years before, David Emerson drew a sharp breath and held his tongue while the law was laid down. The big man had spoken. If Mason expected a reply, he did not await it. Emerson turned his eyes back to the field, to watch young Davy thrust and drive the great Varsity eleven at mighty Michigan as a fencer plays with his blade. But he could not drag his reluctant thoughts away from the scene of his own day. The picture burned. He saw today's battle with Michigan's giants dimly, as through a haze of smoke. Appreciation of young Davy's confident skill faded from his mind. He was no longer aware that the boy's mother, his girl, there beside him, worried for fear her son would be injured.

The first half, ages long for the thousands in the stands, passed quickly for David Emerson. The Varsity, always cocksure and strong, flicked, threatened and smashed at Michigan time after time, trying for ground here, punting there, and refusing always to let the heavy Wolverines set themselves for attack or defense. Michigan, on the other hand, ground away relentlessly at a steady, conservative style of play. Neither could score, in the first half. Which would wear the other down?

DAVID EMERSON and his girl, the boy's mother, stood up with University's thousands to cheer the flashing Varsity as it dashed off the field to the gym for the rest between halves. Even in leaving the gridiron, these boys moved with snap and precision. The crowds sat down, and the yell leaders took up the struggle where the rival quarter-backs had left it. David Emerson looked about him absently, and pressed his wife's hand to reassure her of the boy's safety. She smiled back at him.

Then, suddenly resolute, David Emerson turned his attention to the big man again, reaching past his wife to grasp Mason's sleeve.

"Mr. Mason," he said firmly, "you don't remember me?"

"Why—uh—" The big fellow paused. "Your face is familiar, but I can't call your name."

"Name's Emerson, and I'd like you to meet Mrs. Emerson."

"How d'yuh do, Mrs. Emerson?" grunted Mason. "Glad to see yuh, I'm sure. Emerson? Emerson? Any relation to that boy down there on the team?"

"He's our son," smiled Mrs. Emerson proudly.

"Yeah? Is that so?" asked Mason heavily. "Well, well! The team's doin' purty well. But they'd oughta score on Michigan. Too much smart stuff's the trouble. Now, in my day—uh—ever play any football, Emerson?"

"No," he said deliberately. "Not much."

"Emerson, Emerson!" growled the big fellow, to himself. "Can't place yuh. Play any football here, when I was coachin' this team?" He looked at David narrowly.

"Well," said David slowly, "I did play, on the scrubs. Used to try my hand at quarter-back."

"Now I've got yuh!" exclaimed Mason, his fat pink face breaking into a wrinkled smile. "Sure, sure! Shake, Emerson! I remember yuh now. Glad to see yuh again. Where yuh been all these years?"

"Chasing up and down the face of the earth," Emerson answered. He was conscious that Martha was watching him carefully, and hanging on every word he spoke.

"Doin' well, I hope?" asked Mason.

"Made a couple of fortunes."

"Good, that's great! I have—" began Mason.

"But lost them both," added Emerson.

"Now, that's tough luck," said Mason. "Too bad. Oughta held onto 'em. Now, I've done purty well, myself. Made some money in oil, and believe me, I've hung onto it! Safe and sane, that's me. All I spend is for the joy of livin', see? Nobody can gamble me outa that money in business. Y'd oughta hung onto y'r roll, Emerson."

"Maybe you're right," David Emerson said. "But I'm not complaining."

"That's the stuff. A felluh has to take the breaks as they come," Mason commented. "No use kickin' if the game don't run to suit yuh. But say, didn't yuh play with the Varsity awhile when I was coachin'?"

"I played on your Varsity about ten days, against the scrubs," said Emerson, levelly, "but dropped out just before the Michigan game, twenty years ago today."

"Twenty year—that's a long time," Mason mused. "But yuh dropped out— By jingo, I remember now! Place yuh, perfect. Sure, same as if it was yesterday. We played a nothin'-nothin' tie with Michigan that year. Yeah. Say, Emerson, lemme tell yuh somepin. I never hated anything as much as I hated to have to take yuh outa the line-up that time."

His words carried a ring of sincerity, and David Emerson was startled. His brain started whirling. Could it be, after all these years, that Coach Mason realized he had made a mistake? His heart leaped within him. Had he been in error, all these years, in cherishing bitter memories of Mason and of football?

"Well," he said slowly, "I'm glad to hear you say that, Mason. Because it hurt to be taken off the team."

"Yeah, it was tough," Mason rumbled. "You see, Mrs. Mason, this husband of yours was a crackin' good quarter-back. Just like that boy out there now. But he wouldn't or couldn't remember the rules. We could 'a' beaten Michigan that year, if he'd 'a' stuck to the safe and sane stuff. Grabbed a punt, right in front of the goal posts, he did, instead of lettin' it go over, to be brung out to the twenty-yard—"

EMERSON'S heart sank again. He had been right all the time. Mason's lament was merely because the game with Michigan had not been won. Mason had no qualms over his course. The big man's words trailed away from David's ears, as Emerson's thoughts turned back to that scene on the field. He remembered how bitterly Mason had assailed him, with what burning sarcasm the coach had scorched his young soul. He remembered, last of all, how he had crumpled on the sidelines and cried.

"And he could 'a' been a sensation at quarter, if he'd remembered the rule," he heard Mason's voice concluding.

Why not speak up and explain to the big pink-faced man why it was that he had run back the punt? Why not remind him that the field was wide open, with no runners in sight? Why not ask him if he recalled that he, Emerson, had brought the ball out to the forty-five-yard line, even after the fumble caused by the half-back's interruption?

Why not— But here was a queer idea. Mason talked like a superannuated engineer, with all his rules of thumb. Mason never could build a trans-African railroad, David Emerson smiled to himself. But young Davy, now, that boy could do anything. He could see it in the way the lad handled that Varsity eleven. By George, he'd tell Mason! He turned quickly toward the big fellow, but on catching sight once more of the heavy head and pink face, gave up the notion.

No use, thought David Emerson. Just then the two rival elevens came into view again, and the crowds resumed their uproar of applause. All eyes were on the field, including Mason's and those of Mrs. Emerson, seeking out her boy. Young Davy was there, moving with even more confidence and precision than he had shown in the first half.

The two great and powerful elevens again flew at each other's throats, with renewed determination to find a strangle hold. Michigan went into the fight with all her strength, and more fire than she had yet shown. Varsity redoubled her efforts, and put greater speed than ever into her cocksure, jaunty, slashing attack. The result? A drawn battle that raged up and down the field like a prairie fire between alternating winds. Varsity kicked off, smothered Michigan's run-back, and covered the Michigan punt on first down. Young Davy called for a return punt, also on first down. Michigan tried two plays and encountered a stone wall. Michigan kicked. Varsity smashed through for eight yards in two plays, and kicked. Michigan punted on first down. And so it went, back and forth, up and down the field, each strong eleven seeking a break, a gap in the enemy defense that would permit a rush to victory. But no break came. So, the third quarter.

And still David Emerson sat in a dreamy state. Why could he not decide about that railroad? Should he speak to Mason, the great, slow-thinking hulk, again? What should he cable the syndicate? Explain to him why it was that he had caught the punt and run it back? But things were sadly muddled in his head. His orderly engineering brain had never been so bewildered.

"Mason," he said suddenly, as the elevens changed goals between quarters. "Mason, I never explained why it was that I undertook to run back that punt."

Mason turned slowly toward him.

"I knew you were not the kind that offered alibis," he said, and attempted an ingratiating smile. "But it wouldn't have been any use. Forgot my orders, didn't yuh?"

"Certainly *not*," snapped Emerson. "I knew your rule. Let any kick go over the line. Play safe. Let the ball be brought out to the twenty."

"Sure," agreed Mason. "Then why—"

"Because I had two-thirds of the field clear, the ball was coming into my hands on a dead line, and no scrub player had broken through to come down and tackle," said Emerson, speaking slowly and distinctly. "That half-back came yelling, and made me look away from the ball long enough to fumble. But even so, I recovered and got out to the *forty-five*-yard line before they threw me—twenty-five yards better than your rule would have permitted; and held the ball there."

He looked intently at Mason as he concluded, and felt a friendly pressure on his arm from his wife's hand. Martha knew, he felt, and understood, just as she had always understood and sympathized.

"Yeah," grunted Mason. "But s'pose y'd not recovered y'r fumble? Where'd yuh been then? On the goal line, or behind it maybe. See? That's why I made that rule. Couldn't have anybody upsetting the program, see?"

"And if any one did upset it, with reason, and prove he was right in doing so," said Emerson, with a trace of bitterness, "he was thrown out, just as the poor boob who forgot the rule?"

"Absolutely," growled,Mason. "Yuh see, Emerson, I was down there in charge of football, not for myself, but for the Varsity. You were playin' not for y'r own sake, but for the Varsity. I had to play safe, to avoid mistakes. So did you. If I couldn't trust you, I had to put in some one else. See? We couldn't put the Varsity in the hole by takin' chances. No, sir."

Emerson, wondering vaguely why he had never thought of that, hesitated to reply. By George, there might be something in it! He turned mechanically back to watch the play on the field, but his thoughts clung to Mason's argument. Play was for the University's sake, not for his own. Had he been selfish in attempting a brilliant run, in violation of rules, when playing safe was to the Varsity's best interest?

"Martha, Martha!" whispered David Emerson, fumbling for his wife's hand. It had just occurred to him, after pondering what Mason had said, that perhaps he had played the game in the same selfish way all through his life. Those successes he had made—were they for himself, or for his family? And when he gambled for greater stakes with the winnings already made, had he taken thought of his family's well-being? Turning cold, he feared he had not. The great railroad commission came into his mind again.

"Martha," he whispered, as she leaned toward him, "I've played business the same way I played football. Did you hear what he said?"

She nodded, faced him and smiled brightly.

"Have you ever heard me complain of the way we've played?" she asked.

"And that railroad's all tangled up with this football game," he said, not hearing her question.

David Emerson shook his head, bewildered, and once more turned his eyes to the football field. He wished he were enjoying the game, instead of puzzling over problems old and new.

"LOOK there, Emerson," he heard Mason calling heavily. "Michigan's taken a third down over by the sidelines, and failed to gain. Has to punt."

Emerson, waking up from his torment, forgot his railroad, and took in the situation at a glance. The scene was strangely familiar. Was he dreaming? Was he, David Emerson, standing down there on the field before the Varsity goal posts? No, of course not.

"By George!" he exclaimed. "Look, Mason, look! That's the way it was! See, there's Michigan, at the fifty-yard line, on the edge of the field, left side. And there's young Davy down in front of the goal posts to receive the kick. It was just like that!"

"Yeah," grunted Mason, "and see what happens. We've gotta win this game. See? Cert'nly not lose it. Thousands here wantin' to win, see? Kid's gotta play this thing safe. A fumbled punt right there would lose the game."

Emerson could say nothing. He saw a half-back trot back down the field, to take his place at young Davy's left, over in the corner of the field. He looked at young Davy, poised there on the ten-yard line, cockier than ever, waiting for the Michigan punt. His heart pounded hard. He wished that he were down there in the boy's place, with the boy's chance. And even as he looked, he knew that young Davy would do exactly what he had done, twenty years before. Everything to gain, nothing to lose. Fortune and fame if he won. No disgrace if he lost. Those other engineers had said—but no, that was the railroad again—his problem, not Davy's.

Looking up the field, he saw the ball snapped back to the Wolverine punter, a great rangy fellow. As the ball twirled and slipped through the air, he shot an eye across the line of scrimmage. Varsity held.

Came a sharp *thwack* as the Michigan kicker cracked a low, spinning drive.

"Take it, Davy! Take it, boy!" screamed David Emerson, jumping up from his place on the stands. He would have given millions to be sure, in that one fleeting instant, that the boy would catch the ball and run it back. Was not the whole right side of the field wide open in front of him?

"Man, are yuh crazy?" yelled Mason.

But David Emerson's advice was neither heard nor heeded. The ball shot on a line directly at the boy, like a sharp, accurate throw to second base. Young Davy took the ball in his two hands as coolly as he would grasp a pitcher of ice-water, and without hesitation dashed straight up the field. David Emerson, adding his voice to the voices of thousands, screamed and raved. His throat cracked under the strain. He paused, and then screamed again.

"Nobody near you, boy," he shouted. "Run, run!"

The field was clear an instant, as Varsity held off the plunging Wolverines seeking to get through and go down the field to tackle the runner. Young Davy was at the thirty-yard line before Michigan broke through. An end, once down, picked himself up and shot at the boy from an angle. Young Davy swerved sharply to the right, and outran the first attempted tackle. A Michigan back came over on the run and essayed a headlong flying dive. Davy stepped outside it. At the forty-five-yard line he was near the right edge of the field, but clear. But at midfield, Michigan's safety man, the punter himself, flung himself across the boy's path.

"Cut back, cut back," screamed David Emerson.

The boy wheeled sharply, thrust in toward the center of the field, whirled again, and once more was off toward the Michigan goal line. But the delay at midfield slowed him down so that, even as the thousands of University rooters were hoarsely demanding a touchdown, two Michigan tacklers overhauled young Davy from the rear. They could not reach him for clean-cut tackles, but rather dragged him down, so that he fell, sprawling, on the Michigan forty-yard line.

David Emerson, mute now and helpless, dumbly reached out his arms to lift the boy to his feet. Martha Emerson, nerves unstrung, was crying joyfully.

"But David, David!" she said. "They'll hurt him, they'll hurt him."

David's first thought was not to stop to comfort her, but to pound Mason on the back and ask him if he saw the play. But he turned to the field again when he noticed, above the din and commotion, that the great hulk was quivering with excitement and screaming louder than anybody within twenty feet of him. Mason! he thought in disgust. Willing to take the fruits when another took the chance.

YOUNG Davy bounced to his feet almost the same instant he was thrown, jammed the ball to the ground, turned and waved to the Varsity racing eagerly up the field, danced about in nervous excitement, and began screaming signals.

Michigan lined up doggedly enough, but Michigan rooters hunched over in the stands, asking themselves if this could be the break of the game. Varsity shot into position, young Davy barked a command, the ball came back, Varsity sifted through on the jump, and the boy coolly shot a hard forward pass to the waiting left end.

"Poor play, there," growled Mason.

"Gained fifteen yards," snapped Emerson, rather contemptuous of the big fellow than bitter toward him, as he had been all these years.

"Oughta play it safe," said Mason, doggedly. "Pass too risky."

Young Davy called another forward pass, shooting the ball to the right end for five yards more. Then, with Michigan spreading in anticipation of a third pass, the boy shot the full-back through between tackle and guard for five yards more. Another first down. Fifteen yards to the goal line. The boy did not hesitate. With victory in sight he whipped the Varsity down upon Michigan as a muleteer lashes his blacksnake about a balky animal's head. An off-tackle play produced two yards, and brought the Michigan defense close up. Second down. A line plunge netted two more, and further tightened the Wolverine bulwark. Third, and six to go.

"Say!" David Emerson heard Mason saying. He refused to take his eyes off the field. Mason plucked his sleeve, reaching across in front of Martha. "That's the stuff. Plug it to 'em, but hold the ball!"

David Emerson did not reply. He was watching young Davy justify his own football theory, and, more precious still, his own theory of life itself. The unexpected should triumph, he said to himself. And even as he watched, with Michigan crouching desperately on her own eleven-yard mark, holding tight against further line-smashing, young Davy took the ball from center, stepped calmly back a pace or two, and then shot a quick, snappy pass to the left end, who broke loose to race the few needed steps over the goal line. Michigan eleven and rooters alike were dismayed. University's thousands went wild.

Six points, and the goal, seven. Victory it was, undoubtedly. Only a minute remained to play. Varsity held, though Michigan fought frantically. The game ended before the thousands in the stands had recovered from the first wild unbelievable thrill. A tremendous struggle between powerful and evenly matched elevens had turned on one unexpected play, and one boy's inspiration that violated all the rules of safety and sanity.

"It's all right, Martha," said David Emerson. "It's all right. The game's over, and Davy's not got a scratch. Good boy, Davy. He could build any old railroad that ever was."

"He did what you would have done, didn't he, David?" she asked, smiling up at him. He was standing, unable to control his pounding arteries. His impulse was to leap from his seat to the ground, and rush to join the hundreds of undergrads seeking to carry young Davy on their shoulders. But it was too far to jump, he thought, and smiled at the foolish notion. Besides, he could not have reached the boy through the mass of excited, struggling humanity.

Mason? Yes, there was poor old, deluded Mason, thought David Emerson, exulting. A great football coach in his day, no doubt, but utterly unaware of the true end and aim of the gridiron sport—and just as completely ignorant of the end and aim of all living.

"Well, Mason," said Emerson, "we've whipped Michigan at last."

"First time in years," said Mason slowly. "But we were lucky—awful lucky! Took terrible chances. Might 'a' been ruined."

David Emerson smiled. He could afford to smile now, after all these twenty years of bitter memories. Young Davy, down there on the field, had justified him, despite all the Masons in the world. And he could even feel sorry for the big, ponderous, stupid Mason—now.

"The boy took his chance," David Emerson said quickly, still smiling. "He had to take his chance to win. He gambled winning against losing, rather than play it safe, to neither win nor lose. He gambled, and won! That is playing football, and playing it well. And that, Mason, is also playing the bigger game of life."

"Yeah, but—" began Mason heavily. Emerson was not to be interrupted. This was his moment, the first in twenty years.

"YOU see, Mason," Emerson continued, "football and life are just like a fight. Ever hear of the immortal Cyrano, Mason? No? Well, he told us long ago that the true joy in fighting is not winning, or losing, but fighting well. It's the same in football, Mason—and in life. Win or lose, it's all the same. But, playing or fighting the best we know how, Mason, we generally win."

"Ah!" growled the pink-faced hulk. "Sweetness and light, sweetness and light. But maybe"—he stuck out his heavy hand to shake Emerson's—"maybe you're right. All I've got to say is, in football, or life, or a fight, the first thing is to know the rules."

"Absolutely," agreed David Emerson, heartily. "And the second thing is to know when to forget them. But excuse me, Mason. Come on, Martha. Let's go down and see the boy at the gym. I may not have known when to forget the rules, Mason, but that boy of mine—"

He did not wait to finish his remark. They clambered down the stands, David Emerson and his girl, young Davy's mother, hand in hand, to seek the youngster. David Emerson took a long breath. He knew what he would do about that railroad.

"We've got to hurry, Martha," he said. "I've got to cable those people in Rome. Time's up, you know. If I don't get a move on and grab that railroad job, young Davy's liable to beat me to it."

"I knew it," she replied, laughing.

"Knew what?" he asked sharply.

"That he would," she said, smiling warmly into his eyes, "and you will."

A Novelette

Interlude

When a Calm Business Girl Marries a Jazz King, Life Is Certain to Be Speeded Up in at Least One Household

By Octavus Roy Cohen

Illustration by Harry T. Fisk

IT WAS no cause for wonderment that Ellen Shannon should fall in love. For twenty-three years she had had the instinct and the capacity, but it so happened that until Conrad Ellison slouched into her little music store and immodestly catalogued his fitness for the position which she had to offer, she had come in contact with the male sex only in the most casual and impersonal manner.

Ellen Shannon was not beautiful; she was not, perhaps, even pretty. Rather she was of that type of physical and personal attractiveness which is most aptly described as "sweet." She was small and demure and very simple in her manner of dress, and there was an air of quiet, expectant wistfulness in her big brown eyes as though she knew that life had withheld much from her; withheld unjustly, for when the capacity for love has been implanted so deeply in a woman it is mockery that she should be denied the opportunity to exercise it.

It was not her nature consciously to attract men. As a matter of fact she was rather afraid of them; was more or less ill at ease in their society. She was sufficiently attractive to have drawn them to her had she tried, but she could not try—and would not have known what to do with them had they responded to deliberate allure on her part. Always she had known the impulse to mother a man, to feel that she was indispensable—and the jaunty, debonair self-sufficiency of the young male of her generation somewhat appalled her.

It was perhaps the desperation in Conrad Ellison's eyes which first riveted her attention. She knew afterward that she would in all probability have hired him even had he been less perfectly fitted to the job which she had to offer. She saw the grim finger of physical want poked mockingly through his air of indifference, understood the appeal in his gray eyes, caught the fear and the hope in his theatric smile. . . . It required a genuine effort on her part to be businesslike.

"You can play the piano?"

"I'll say!"

"And sing?"

"Well, I ain't any John Steel, maybe, but I throw a pretty wicked warble."

Egotistic? She wasn't sure. But she was sure that he was very pathetically trying to impress upon her that he was neither needy nor seedy when her quiet, observant eyes told her that he was both.

Even at that she did not know the extent of his necessity: she did not know, for instance, that he had not eaten satisfactorily for three days, or that he was so short of funds that he had selected foods which were calculated to destroy his appetite rather than to satisfy it; nor did she know that the snappy gray hat, the chamois gloves and the whippy little cane represented a hunger sacrifice on the altar of the God of Appearances. It was Ellison's shibboleth that nothing succeeds like success and that there is no employment for the down-and-outer. He fondly believed that the world was fooled—particularly this sweet-faced girl; and he retained that delusion because he could not read the mother light in her eyes nor sense the maternal instinct beneath her forcedly impersonal exterior.

"THE job," she went on softly, "isn't very wonderful. I have a small place here, just a little community music store. But I do need a young man with personality who can play jazz music and sing jazz lyrics. Do you think you can?"

His broad mouth expanded into a queerly attractive smile. "Try me!" he invited, and at her nod crossed to the upright piano near the sheet-music counter.

She found him peculiarly interesting. He was tall—a full inch more than six feet—and he walked with a loose-jointed, not ungraceful, lurch. His clothes, scarcely showing their touches of careful darning, were the last word in Rialto snap: a three-button coat which fitted his long, slender body; trousers of extreme English type which left one with no illusions as to the lack of flesh on his inordinately long legs. His smile was engaging, almost too much so: it was the smile of a man who knows that he has personality and makes the mistake of abandoning naturalness in the desperate attempt to stretch that quality beyond its limit.

He selected at random a new number which bore the enlightening title "My Big Jazz Baby Is Home Again," shrugged his narrow shoulders as he adjusted himself comfortably on the bench; then his long, slender fingers rippled the keys.

He played softly, with fine disregard of the printed notes of the bass clef, inserting instead a toe-tickling improvisation. And then, as he reached the chorus, his touch became firmer and surer and louder, he flung back his head with a gesture which tossed his overlong, sandy hair from his forehead as he burst forth into the somewhat indiscreet words with a nasal tenor which was not entirely lacking in sweetness.

The spirit of the thing seemed to pervade him; he lost himself in the trivial music; his long, lithe body swayed and writhed with enthusiasm, his fingers discovered new and amazing twists and turns and runs, he crashed into unorthodox full-stops, uncalled-for crescendos and astonishing diminuendos. Ellen watched fascinatedly. The man had completely forgotten himself, just as a finished musician forgets himself in the rendition of a classic. It was plain to her that this was a classic to Conrad Ellison—it was *his* music. He smiled as he sang, smiled with an enjoyment which was not assumed. He was the spirit of jazz.

He stopped abruptly on an effective, tantalizing false note and as he swung from the keyboard to face her she saw the look of genuine pleasure leave his face and in its stead come the forced, appealing smile which said plainly as words: "I'm trying to make you believe I'd be doing you a favor by working here, but really I need the job. I'm hungry!"

What he actually said was: "Well, ain't I a darb?"

She nodded gravely. "That was very fine. I liked it."

"I thought you would. I'm a syncopated lulu. Me and jazz were hatched from the same egg." Then—as though he feared the actual test: "Do I land the posish?"

She experienced a distinct sense of embarrassment. "If you want it—" The look of gratitude which lighted his not unhandsome but rather vapid countenance, rewarded her instantly. "Of course," she hastened to add, "the salary is small."

"Money and me are enemies. Three squares is all I ask."

"I can pay only eighteen dollars a week."

"I'll take it." He leaned forward with an eagerness she couldn't have resisted. "Shall we call it a deal?"

"Yes."

His hand shot forward. "Shake!"

Her soft little hand was lost in his: a new and delicious thrill pervaded her body and she withdrew her hand in sudden panic. She spoke to hide the confusion which confounded and amazed her.

"When can you start, Mr. Ellison?"

"Now," he grinned, "or a little bit sooner. There's no time like the present except yesterday."

THUS it was that Conrad Ellison came into the quiet, manless life of Ellen Shannon; it was thus that the little blind archer sped an arrow which pierced her heart and remained fixed there for all time; it was thus that, for the first time in her life, a man, a young personable man—was cast in daily contact with her; and it would have been strange indeed if the long dormant love instinct within the girl should not have been brought to life.

She did not fall in love with him at once; nor did she realize then, or ever, that it was propinquity which did the work. Ellen, unfortunately, had no standards by which to gauge a man: she had known scores of them, but the acquaintanceships had been dully impersonal. She knew men as members of the human race who wore pants and were, as a rule, pleasant customers.

It does not matter, either, that she would in all probability not have fallen in love with Ellison had she been a girl of many masculine friendships, for their personalities were as utterly dissimilar as their caste, their tastes and their early environment. She saw him at first only through her own eyes; eyes blinded by the birth pangs of her first love, a perspective distorted out of all proportion. She did not see his weaknesses: did not know that he was a man of few thoughts—and those of no considerable depth—or that he was vain and weak and vapid. She did know that he had few vices, and certainly he was considerate. He was courteous, too, in the twisted manner of the modern younger generation: flip and easy and familiar. But chiefly she did not see his shallow vanity.

His view of her was far less distorted than hers of him. He catalogued her immediately as a dead one, which, in his vocabulary, meant that she was a nice kid and straight as an arrow, but pepless. And pep, in the life of Conrad Ellison and his kind, is the cardinal virtue. Once he informed himself that she was "nice but dumb," then quickly altered that verdict. "Nope, she ain't dumb. Real clever kid—uses her noodle for something besides hanging bobbed hair on. Class to that kid; but slower than an Arkansas freight."

As a matter of fact, Ellison stood somewhat in awe of her. She had education, or so her four years at high school seemed to him: and there was an indefinable quality about her which he could not fathom. She was different from the run of flappers he knew: the slang of the moment came awkwardly from her lips—when, indeed, it came at all; and he could not understand the wistful, speculative light in her eyes.

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But he did know that she was a clever little business woman, and he realized early in the game that he wasn't injuring that business a particle. Yet even he would have been surprised had he known what an excellent investment he was proving. Only Ellen knew that: learned of it as she worked over her books at night and saw that her sheet-music trade had doubled in a month.

It was that blatant personality of his. The neighborhood flappers flocked to the store, and they hovered over his piano. He was always pleasant to a pretty girl: seemed to take it for granted that she regarded him with undiluted approval. And it was his very cocksureness which appealed to them: he kidded with them on their own terms, knew their language, and apparently knew just how far he could go.

ELLISON rapidly became the rage with the young girls of the neighborhood. And they were the type that buys popular music: it became their habit to do all of their buying from him. Within six weeks Ellen was trebling her orders: she voluntarily raised his salary from eighteen to twenty-five dollars a week. She loved the smile with which he thanked her.

"Putting it over, ain't we?" (She wished he would call her "Kid" sometimes.) "You and I make a pretty snappy team, eh?"

"We're doing wonderfully," she agreed, getting a secret thrill from the use of the word "we." "I only hope it will continue."

"Continue? It won't. It'll get better. I'm the original little business getter in this line. I've got those flappers eating out of my hand and calling me their sweet papa. They're my meat: I was born to handle 'em. Why, listen! There ain't no tellin' where you and I can take this business to. You'll be opening a Broadway shop inside of a year."

She smiled gravely. "Perhaps."

"There ain't no *perhaps* about it. Why, say! Ellen, you and I can knock 'em dead. Give us a chance and watch our smoke."

It was Saturday night when that conversation occurred. Immediately thereafter they busied themselves closing up the shop. And as she transferred the money from the cash drawer to the little wall safe, he watched her speculatively, and in that moment an idea was born.

Conrad Ellison was a graduate of the school of sophistication: he was an advocate of the doctrine of the soft spot. And tonight it occurred to him very suddenly that Ellen Shannon represented his soft spot.

He had known that she was in love with him long before she permitted herself the luxury of such an admission. The knowledge astonished him until he thought it over soberly and reached the inevitable conclusion that he was just naturally irresistible. They all flopped for him sooner or later. But until tonight he had never regarded the phenomenon with more than amusement. She just simply wasn't his type: he had vaguely fancied himself married to an addle-pated young thing, living in a two-room apartment and eating in downtown restaurants when times were good and munching delicatessen at home when they weren't.

Even now the thought of a comfortable home made no particular appeal to him. He had never had one and therefore did not yearn. But only recently he had suffered through a period of financial stringency which frightened him. For the first time in his life he had known what it was to be genuinely hungry: actually counting pennies. He had never had much money—once he had had nearly a hundred dollars cash; once, and only once. It was not therefore unnatural that Ellen's little business appealed to him as a Gibraltar of financial certainty.

"Golly!" he reflected as the idea struck home. "Her husband would surely have one lead-pipe cinch."

HE INVITED her to supper with him that night and they went to a very famous Broadway delicatessen which caters to a peculiarly picturesque midnight crowd: vaudeville artists, theatrical handy men, racetrack bookmakers and racetrack touts, chorus girls, gamblers, confidence men, with an occasional Rialto magnate and a more occasional sober-faced business man who knows instinctively that he has entered a place where he does not belong and yet does not know how to retreat.

The crowd in this delicatessen between eleven at night and two in the morning is there for the sober purpose of eating; but the shop has become a rendezvous, occupying a niche all its own. It is loud and blatant—and colorful. It's "Hello, Bill! Was you stung heavy on the fourth race today?" and "You Gertie, whenja get in?" and "Oh, me? I'm goin' on the Sunday night concert next week," and "Hey, Ferd! 'Nother one of them turkey legs." There is an atmosphere of easy-going familiarity and something of fraternity and the food is exceedingly good. But as Ellen entered the front door she knew that she did not belong.

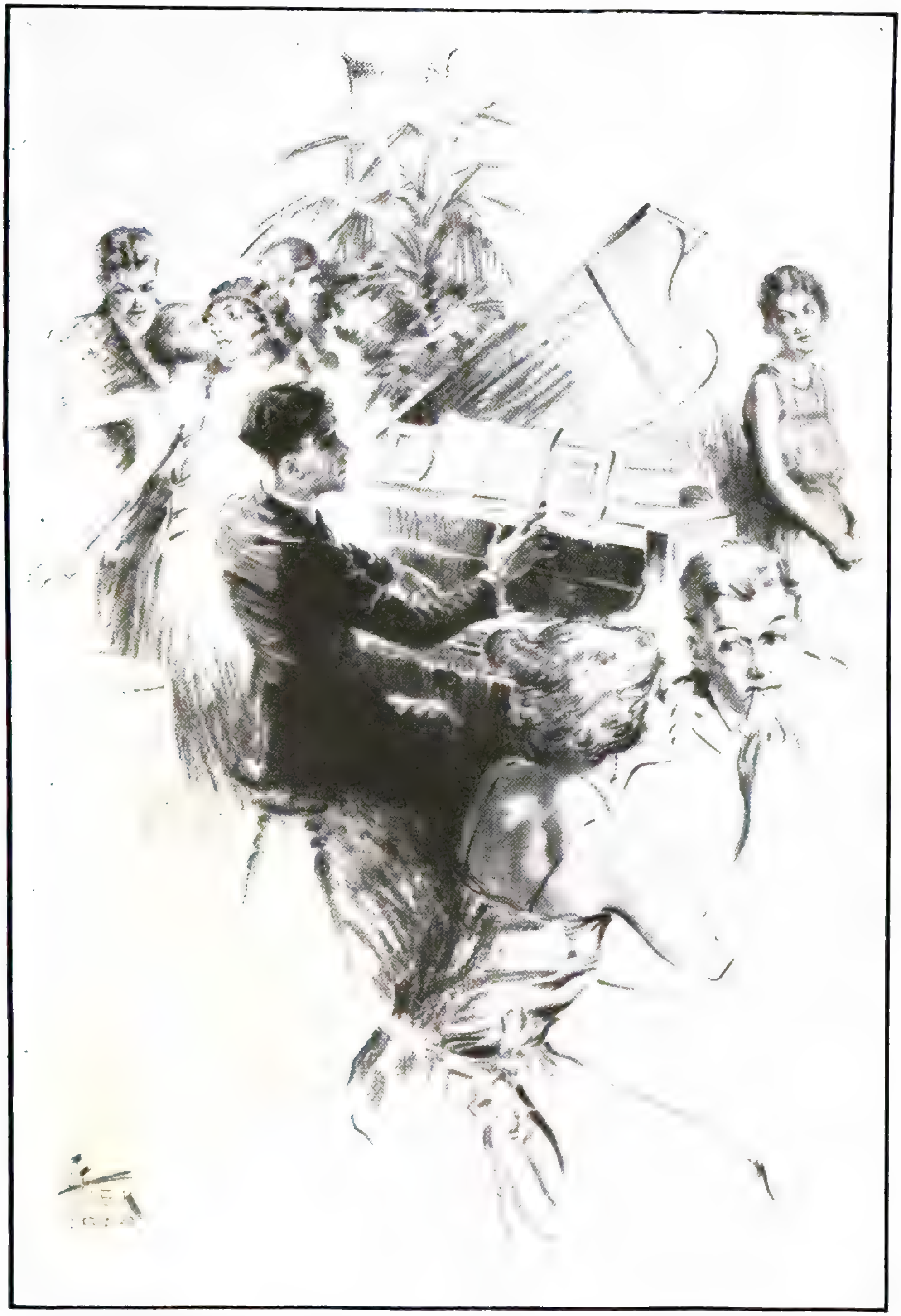
The effect on Ellison was exactly the reverse: he belonged there as surely as a fish belongs in water. He strolled in jauntily, hung hat and topcoat and cane on a rack, and was fortunate enough to find a little booth where he ordered Swiss cheese sandwiches with rye bread for both, and for himself a bottle of near beer.

Ellen watched him with interest. In this place he was sure of himself, instinctively at home. The rather brusque waiters accorded him the same respect which they exhibited toward those who belonged. It is small wonder that he appeared to Ellen Shannon that night as a very metropolitan and wonderful young man—and it is small wonder, too, that she accepted his proposal of marriage.

She was happy and embarrassed and horribly ill at ease as he reached across the onyx-topped table and imprisoned her fluttering hand between both of his. His eyes were shining eagerly and there was no doubting the fact that he was genuinely happy. Not unmindful of the material advantages offered by marriage to her, he was yet fond of the girl: she had befriended him when he needed a friend; she was of a quality hitherto foreign to him; she was fairly pretty and very sweet and if she looked decidedly out of place in this exotic and unnatural atmosphere which he adored, that was a fault which he fancied could be very easily rectified.

"Oh, kid!" he bubbled. "Ain't we gonna knock 'em dead? Ain't we gonna take the world by the tail an' swing it around? Ain't we just?"

"Yes." Her cheeks were stained crimson. The whole thing seemed unreal and unnatural. Was this Ellen Shannon seated here in an unfamiliar atmosphere facing a man who belonged—and to whom she was engaged? a man who held her hand and talked blithely of a future together? She



Con blended perfectly: it was his crowd, his type; and he was in a seventh heaven of delight in the delusion that he was being a regular fellow.

was in a daze; but she knew that she was very happy and once her eyes filled with tears at thought that she would no longer be lonely. It was that horrible loneliness which had hurt so badly: there had been no one to trouble himself over her welfare, no one to whom it had mattered whether she was well or ill; no one vitally interested in her or her life.

Now that was all changed. The face bent close to hers across the table struck her as being handsome; the shallow young man very much of a god. The starved heart of her reached out for the warmth and the affection for which she had always had the capacity—with never a chance for its indulgence. She wanted to break down and cry from sheer happiness.

He took her home, and in the vestibule of her boarding-house in the West Seventies, he took her in his arms and kissed her. Alone on the sidewalk, he shook his head wonderingly.

"Awful queer kid! You'd 'a' thought I was trying to murder her the way she kissed me. Gee! She's got a heap to learn." He lighted a cigarette and strolled toward Columbus Avenue. "She's sweet, though. Make a swell little wife for yours truly. Darned if I ain't nuts about her."

Ellen Shannon glimpsed the reflection of her flaming cheeks and knew a happiness keener than she had believed possible. That night, before dropping off to sleep, she prayed to be made worthy of the gangling piano player to whom she was engaged.

THE engagement marked an epoch in her life. She blossomed under this opportunity for love; but somehow she did not completely lose herself. The instinct of repression had been too strongly implanted during years of loneliness. She seemed afraid to give without stint; but her happiness was so dazzling that even in the intimacies of engagement she did not awaken to the fact that he was not her kind: she saw substance where there was but shadow of substance; brain where there was merely superficial cleverness; depth where there was only cheap glibness.

As for Conrad Ellison, it is possible that he loved the girl as sincerely as he could love any woman. His capacity for love was as limited as hers was limitless. Most of all he was thoughtless: he would not have wounded her intentionally, but Ellison did very few things intentionally: he was a creature of impulse: his chief emotion during those days was one of satisfaction—and of safety.

One day he turned away from the piano, his narrow face wreathed in disgust. "That new number is the bunk," he derided. "Anybody could write a better one."

She placed her hands on his shoulders. "Why don't you write a song, dear?"

"Write one? Gosh! I've written a half-dozen."

"They must be wonderful! Why don't you publish them?"

He smiled in superior fashion as he patted her hand. "Tried. Nothing doing. Tin Pan Alley is a closed corporation. They've got men down there grinding 'em out to order. No chance for the outsider. An' my stuff's got 'em all beat. Say—like to hear one?"

"Would I?"

He settled himself comfortably and rolled into the opening chords. "This is called 'It Ain't Your Figure, Sweetie; It's the Lovin' Way You Have.' Listen. . . ."

Judged by present-day jazz standards, it was an excellent number. It contained all the tried and true musical trickery which has caused jazz to become an international mania: its lyric was grossly suggestive—poorly conceived and poorly executed—but it unquestionably was as good as the average song hit. Familiar as she was with popular music, Ellen sincerely believed that it was the best she had ever heard. It was as good as the majority, and the fact that he had written it completed her illusion.

"You mean to say you couldn't get *that* published?"

"Uh-huh."

"That's unbelievable. I never heard a better one. Why, Con! I never dreamed you could do it. You're marvelous."

"I'll say! But they don't give a guy a chance—down yonder. Stick this number into print an' it'll sell a million copies: easy. Say! Do you really like it?"

"I love it, dear: love it!"

"Oh, gosh! That sure sounds swelegant." He flowered joyously under her praise.

It happened that she was sincere in everything she said, but mere sincerity made small difference to him. The essential thing was that she said it. He played the song again and yet again, but now she was not listening. She stood back from the piano, gazing affectionately at the swaying, loose-jointed figure; the tossing hair; the easy air of assurance. Blinded by love, she was sure that this man was a genius—a genius of jazz; and impulsively she came to him and put her arms around him, her soft cheek against his. He reached up his left hand and gently patted her.

"Honey," she said softly, "we're going to publish that number."

He shook his head slowly. "Not a chance, sweetness. When the Alley crowd sees you're on the outside they take darn good care that you keep on looking in."

"I'm not thinking of that, dear. I have a little money. We're going to publish that song: you and I. We're going to see that it gets its chance."

FOR a moment he sat motionless. Then, quite slowly, he rose and faced her. There was a queer, wondering light in his eyes.

"You mean *you* are going to publish my song? You, with your own money?"

She nodded. And then she found her reward in the radiance which lighted his face. He crushed her to him and in that brief instant he really loved her. She, snuggling tight against his bony frame, the breath almost crushed from her body, knew that this moment was worth everything.

Two months later her little music shop flashed a window display of "It Ain't Your Figure, Sweetie; It's the Lovin' Way You Have." It was cheaply printed and the cover lithographing was vile. But to Con Ellison it was perfect: there across the top was the line he had written: "Conrad Ellison's Latest Smashing Song Hit." In the lower right hand corner was a picture of himself. He forgot that the "Conellen Music Company—Publishers" was himself and Ellen; forgot that the thing was privately printed. Conrad Ellison saw only the good things of life: achievement, even of this sort, was meat and drink to him. He stood somewhat in awe of himself.

"Gee!" he reflected. "I'm a song writer now, sure 'nough."

The number sold slowly. Con plugged it in their shop; plugged it without abashment. But very few of the other shops would handle it. It was good, they said, but not unusual: they were overloaded. A few of them consented to stock the number on consignment, and managed to sell a few copies. Con tried to interest the phonograph record manufacturers, but met with no success and little encouragement. Surveying the situation some time after publication, they realized that they would just about break even: just that and no more.

But both were happy. And both were unconvinced of his mediocrity. A second number was published: "My Big Blonde Baby Ain't Goin' Away No More." This started a trifle more auspiciously than the first. And three weeks after its publication Ellen Shannon became Mrs. Conrad Ellison.

The ceremony was quiet; Ellen's realization that she was married was disturbing. She experienced anew the thrill which had come to her the night of their engagement. It was difficult to believe that this was herself, that she was married—and to a man whom she worshiped. He was very gentle and tender and sweet; no bride could have asked greater consideration from her husband.

Immediately after the ceremony she had a long and serious talk with him. She was a trifle embarrassed at their situation, and she explained to him that in becoming her husband he had automatically attained an equal partnership in the little music store. No more salary of twenty-five dollars a week: the thing was half his. He was obtrusively grateful. His feelings were very close to the surface and she took her happiness from the genuine quality of his gratitude, never suspecting that within a week the thing would have become a status to him, something which was to be taken for granted.

THEY moved into a little two-room-and-kitchenette apartment two blocks removed from the music store. They bought inexpensive but attractive furniture on the instalment plan. Then, for two weeks, Ellen luxuriated in home-making: the buying of little gewgaws and knickknacks here and there—a bit of imitation tapestry, a picture, two cloisonné vases (which he thought were absurd), a piano lamp: a score and one of little things which converted the stuffy apartment into a home. It was so thrillingly different to her now—this home-making for a man, for her husband.

For about a month he enjoyed it. It was doggoned nice, he reflected, to come home of an evening to the cozy apartment whither she had preceded him; to sit down to a well-prepared dinner, to lounge around afterward and chat with her of things in general, but more particularly of himself. That was the one subject of which he never tired—and her idolatry of him grew with the passing of each day. His ego fed voraciously upon her uncompromising belief in his greatness: the little faults and frailties which cropped out in the early days of their married life she attributed to the stirrings of genius within him. Her belief in him was little short of superb, and so it was that less than six months after their marriage the Conellen Music Company published the third of his songs—a lilting, jazzy, whistly number with a broad lyric and the title, "I Need a New Sweet Mama for Saturday Night."

Experience had taught Ellen more than a trifle. The printing and lithographing of the "Sweet Mama" number cost less and was better and more effective. They made a window of it and managed to place consignments in a half-dozen of the small Broadway music shops. By some unaccountable miracle the thing caught on. Con Ellison heard people whistling it on the streets: on those rare occasions he with difficulty suppressed the desire to rush up to them and proclaim himself the composer. He took to hanging around the shops which had stocked his number and volunteering to play and sing it for casual customers.

Then Ellen went in person to one of the largest of the phonograph record manufacturers. The day following, the chief executive delivered her and Con to the mercies of his musical expert. In a narrow little room, Con banged out the number on the piano and sang it with all the power at his command. It was exceedingly effective and when they left the place they carried with them a check for two hundred dollars and a copy of the contract they had signed giving over to the company all mechanical rights to this particular number.

It was issued a short time later as the reverse side of a record which had taken Broadway by storm. That was a regular practice of the big companies—to put an unknown cheap number on the reverse side of a hit. This enabled them to strike a balance in the cost of the record—a small price for the unknown thing as against the excessive royalty they were called upon to pay for the proven success.

The record sold voluminously on the reputation of the known number. Both numbers on the record were orchestra selections—both rendered by one of the most popular dance orchestras of the day. The orchestration of the "Sweet Mama" song had been cleverly done. But the proven hit, by one of the sure-fire Tin Pan Alley song writers and published by one of the largest and most influential of the music houses, failed to hold its own against "I Need a New Sweet Mama for Saturday Night."

WITHIN a month the "Sweet Mama" foxtrot had duplicated the amazing success of "Dardanella" and "Poor Butterfly" of bygone days. The record sold as fast as the factory could turn it out. It was whistled everywhere; dance orchestras played it; Tin Pan Alley sat up and took notice. It desired to know who this man Ellison was, and where he was, and why he never before had been heard from. But even before it pressed its inquiries the phonograph company sent for Con Ellison and paid him five hundred dollars to make a vocal record of the number.

It was typical of the man that he did not experience the faintest qualm of stage fright. It was typical, too, that he took his success for granted. From a financial standpoint they did well. It was plain that by the time the financial returns were in—and recognizing the illimitable handicaps attendant upon their lack of distribution facilities—they would have cleared more than five thousand dollars on the number. It was stupendous, amazing, glorious—and Ellen experienced for the third time in a year a happiness which few people know even once.

In the first place Con acquired a beatitude which surpassed understanding. For the first time in his life he was a celebrity, a personage. He had business cards engraved: "Conrad Ellison—Composer of 'I Need a New Sweet Mama for Saturday Night.'" He basked contentedly in the unstinted adulation of his wife; but it was not long before that palled slightly. Con was instinctively of the Rialto. He spent more than four hundred dollars for a new outfit of clothes, the first fine clothes he had ever owned. Ellen gasped when she saw him in them: they were not at all what she would have selected. They shrieked at the casual observer, they commanded attention; and a puzzled frown creased her forehead as she noticed that they became him better than quieter clothes would have done.

One night Con went alone to the famous Broadway delicatessen where he had proposed marriage to Ellen. It became bruited about that the author of the "Sweet Mama" song was in the place. Almost instantly he became the center of a vociferously admiring group. He expanded gloriously under the broadside of crude flattery: he could no more resist than he could have vaulted the Woolworth Building. It was his evening of supreme happiness.

And that night he did not get home until four o'clock in the morning. He had the grace to be somewhat abashed as he slunk into the tiny apartment, and he was sincerely grateful that Ellen asked no questions. But the next morning he fled from the reproachful look in her fine, quiet eyes and he vowed that he had attended his last wild party.

He was a creature of good intentions, but the second night after that he convinced himself that it would be bad business to refuse the invitation. Several of the most successful song writers in the country were included in the party list. Some one suggested that he bring along the little wife, but he laughed the suggestion aside. He knew that Ellen was a dead one where wild parties were concerned; not that she wasn't a good sport and all that, but she certainly didn't fit into this gay life. Not Ellen: she was a home body.

He was not dishonest with her. It was not Conrad Ellison's way to be dishonest with any one except himself. He telephoned and told her frankly that he had been invited to a party with several of the country's most successful song writers and that he knew it would be good business to accept.

She caught the nuance of pleading in his voice and bade him go and have a good time. He told her that she was a darned good kid and rushed away to join the others, proclaiming loudly that he had the swellest little wife in the world—and then he promptly forgot her. Nothing vicious about him, nothing bad: he was simply weak and vain and swept from all semblance of balance by this tidal wave of success and popularity.

WEEKS passed. Wild parties, lasting until early morning, became the rule rather than the exception. He no longer asked her permission: he eased his own conscience by believing that his attendance was necessary to their future. He spoke of the midnight revelry only occasionally when she was present, and then, with ridiculous and exquisite naïveté, generally prefaced his remarks with: "Now, a man of my prominence in the song-writing world . . ." On these occasions she tried to conceal from him the wistfulness of her heart: she trusted him; it was such a pity, though, that he was so weak in the face of praise. It was to him what whisky is to the dipsomaniac. And she—well, she couldn't praise him fulsomely as these shallow, insincere, success-worshiping friends did: she knew him too well, her love for him was too deep. She felt that he should *know* how she felt—and on the few occasions now when she essayed to tell him how great he was, she could see plainly that her praise was pallid by comparison with the boisterous enthusiasm of his new friends.

She did not begrudge him his success: she was more genuinely proud of him than he was of himself, but she was intensely jealous of its effect upon her happiness. No longer did she work around her little apartment with a song on her lips: the music shop which had meant so much to her for so many years, lost much of its significance.

She felt that they were drifting apart: she recognized the futility of any effort she might make to hold him. She loved him none the less, but the fact was driven home to her that they were cast in different molds: she saw his weaknesses now, where before she had seen only his strength. The veil was removed from before her eyes. It made no slightest difference in the quality of her love; that was something which had come to her late and all-powerfully: nothing that he could ever do could cause it to waver. But she found herself wishing that his success would pass before it was too late, and that she would have him to herself again. She prayed for that—and hated herself for her prayer.

With the passing of the weeks he was less and less in her society, and he did not bother with explanations. Once or twice he asked half-heartedly if she would join them, and seemed to be piqued at her refusal. On one somber occasion she tried it and proved a wet blanket. That was her last attempt. She could not vie with the overpainted, blasé, strident-voiced females or tolerate the easy, blatant familiarity of the men. They were coarse and she hated coarseness, yet she was amazed to see that her husband blended perfectly: it was his crowd, his type; and he was in a seventh heaven of delight in the delusion that he was being a regular fellow.

And so he attended his parties, consorted with his new-found friends, basked in the spotlight, wallowed in shallow flattery—while she directed the business and struggled to renew for him the attractiveness of the little apartment. She was a lonely girl during those days—fearfully lonely; more lonely than she had ever been in the barren years before she experienced the flowering of love. She hated herself for criticizing him; and it was not until the day he told her of his new number that her eyes were fully opened to the horrid potentialities of the situation.

HIS forced geniality at dinner warned her: that, and the fact that he was obviously ill at ease. He was unnaturally good-humored; he called her Old Kid and Sweet Mama. But she was not fooled. A foreboding of evil was with her, and it became certainty when, after dinner, he took her on his knee and snuggled his head against her breast—for all the world like a big, naughty boy who anticipates punishment.

"My Old Lady feeling peppy tonight?"

"Yes, dear."

"Be kind of glad to hear some good news about her Daddy?"

"Always, sweetheart: you know that."

"Sure I do, Kid—sure I do. That's why I didn't tell you anything beforehand: saved it all up for one grand big surprise." He paused awkwardly, and then: "It's about 'My Snugglin' Baby.' "

He felt her figure grow tense under his touch: "My Snugglin' Baby" was his supreme effort. It was a number which contained all the elements of a sure-fire hit; they expected great things of the song, in view of Con's new reputation and the greater ease with which distribution would be effected. Too, they had expected that it would put the Conellen Music Company firmly on its feet. Ellen did not know what was coming, but she was afraid. At last she voiced the query:

"What about it, dear?"

He drew from his pocket a long, legal-looking document and flipped it open before her eyes. "Read that, hon. Ain't it the tomcat's whiskers?"

She read. After all, it was unnecessary to read far beyond the preamble. The words blurred before her eyes, but the portent stood out starkly.

It was a formal contract between the Exclusive Music Publishing Company, party of the first part, and Conrad Ellison, Composer and Lyricist, party of the second part, for a term of ten years from the date of execution. It gave to the Exclusive sole rights to all musical compositions of any sort from the pen of Conrad Ellison, but did not bind them to publish. Save for the fact that the terms were fair and that it carried an advance cash payment of five thousand dollars, it was just such a contract as a man of Con's lack of perception would have signed. It was a strictly unilateral document: they gambled five thousand dollars on him—and they sewed him hand and foot. He guaranteed to deliver for their approval a minimum of eight numbers a year: in the event of rejection by them the numbers would represent so much deadwood.

But it was not that which cut Ellen to the quick: it was the fact that the document which he held before her eyes represented a barrier between them. It was incontrovertible evidence of bad faith on his part. Without argument, without consultation, he had destroyed the Conellen Music Company. Nor was it the destruction of that sentimental dream of hers—their company publishing his song successes—so much as it was the cowardly way in which he had proceeded. And it *was* cowardly: the transaction must have been in process of negotiation for some time—the contract itself attested that fact.

ELLEN knew that her sound business sense would have prompted her to accede to the idea of an association with the Exclusive had she been consulted. It was a tremendously big and successful house, with a great executive at its head, and enormous resources for plugging potential hits. Of course she would have insisted upon a better contract. But all of those details paled into nothingness before the hurt he had inflicted upon her by failure to consult. That was the barb that stung beyond belief.

She returned it to him without a word, slipped from his knee and walked quietly into the bedroom. He stared after her in amazement, his lower jaw drooping. Doggone Ellen! He never could understand her. Why hadn't she created a scene? He had been all primed for that. But just to walk away—no recrimination, no bitterness—confound it! It wasn't fair. He deluded himself into believing that he was a very much injured young man. He flung across the room after her and opened the bedroom door. She was standing at the window, staring down at the seethe of traffic in the street below, and sight of her pathetic little figure merely fanned to fury the flames of his unreasoning resentment.

"Well," he snapped, "I guess you're sore."

She answered quietly, without turning. "No, Con; I'm not sore. Just hurt."

"Oh! Hurt, is it? Well, it seems to me that when a guy has just put a big deal across his wife ought to enthuse a little. Here I come home all pepped up an' flash a big contract on you an' you run off by yourself an' say you're hurt. What right have you got to be hurt, anyway? I guess I'm the one that ought to be hurt. I guess I got a right to expect my wife to be glad I'm successful."

He was lashing himself into a very righteous anger. The girl heard the words with a startling lack of emotion: beneath the pain of it there was nothing; a void had come into her life; she was numb.

"Please don't let's talk about it, Con. I can't enthuse—not now."

"Swell wife, you are—I don't think!" The man was actually making himself believe that he was the injured person. "You're a peach, I say! I guess it don't mean anything to you that Abe Rothstein, head of Exclusive, says I'm the greatest little ol' song writer that ever jimmied his way into Tin Pan Alley. I guess that don't mean anything to you, huh?"

"Nothing special: not tonight."

"I thought not. I guess you wanted me to be a bum always, like I was when I took that lousy job in your music joint. I guess you'd rather have had me stick to your rotten little publishing business so that you'd get some of the gravy: I guess that's what you're sore about—"

"That's what you would naturally think, isn't it, Con?"

"Sure I would. And why shouldn't I? You know as well as me this number is going to be a knockout—an' you hate to see it slip through your fingers. Well, I ain't dumb; not by a darn sight, I ain't. An' by gosh! If you ain't gonna get pepped up over this success of mine I know where I can find a gang that is." He waved his hand with an insouciance which he did not feel. "Ta-ta, Kid."

The door slammed belligerently behind him: she saw his long, lean figure emerge from the apartment house, hail a taxi and then saw the taxi disappear in the traffic. It headed downtown: she knew what that meant—the delicatessen where he had proposed to her; that delicatessen and the futile, insincere crowd which gathered there with ever a word of fulsome praise and a hearty slap on the back for the success of the moment.

At first she was conscious of no distinct emotion. Then a great pity came to her, a pity which vied with her sorrow: pity for him—he was so weak, so boyish, so thoroughly irresponsible. It never occurred to her, even in this hour of travail and disillusionment, that she did not love him. That was something over which she had no control. And she realized tonight that he needed her, needed her more keenly than he had that day when he sought a job—hungry and threadbare and hopeless. She knew that her love was about to be tried—and she knew that she would not be found wanting. But oh, the hurt of it!

THE months which followed were not happy ones. "My Snugglin' Baby" was brought out by Exclusive with a great fanfare of trumpets and aggressive plugging. It caught on like wild-fire and smashed all previous sales records. Its jazzy, lilting melody was whistled the length and breadth of the land: great vaudeville stars exploited it from the stages of the best variety houses; the phonograph people reported stupendous sales; money poured into Conrad Ellison's pocket like water.

He was at home very little, principally because he was uncomfortable in the presence of his wife. She never criticized; never stooped to reproach him. He scrupulously turned over to her one-half of his income, after deducting their living expenses—it was not until months later that he learned she had been depositing her share to the credit of his personal account at his bank. And when he did learn that, he couldn't understand. There were a great many things about Ellen which he failed to understand.

For instance he knew that she knew of the wild parties which were becoming the rule rather than the exception in his life: she knew of his intimate association with men and women whom he should not have associated with; she knew of all that and she did not protest. And, failing to understand her, he became resentful. Instinct told him that he was wrong, but such intelligence as he possessed had been swept away by the flood tide of success and cheap, tawdry popularity. It was only when he was away from the reproachful light in her quiet, observant brown eyes that he could, as he expressed it, "let loose." And letting loose was his pet diversion.

He wrote another number. It duplicated the astounding success of "My Snugglin' Baby." There was no questioning the fact that he was a genius. He had no analytic ability: he was Jazz—he loved it and he wrote what he loved, believing sincerely that it was the finest music in the world. And, measured by the standards of mere material success, the public agreed with him.

He and Ellen saw very little of each other: they seldom went out together. Once Abe Rothstein gave a great dinner in the largest private dining-room of a mammoth hotel in honor of Conrad Ellison, and Ellen was forced to attend. She selected her dress with meticulous care: it was simple but handsome. Her instinct had been for an inexpensive dress, for she knew that she would wear it only once, but she was keenly alive to any injustice that she might do her husband in public.

She found herself seated next to Rothstein, and, much to her surprise, she liked the man. He was big and paunchy and florid and he had a loud, coarse humor which was somehow not objectionable. It was when he engaged her in conversation that she saw a different side: she knew in a moment that he was intensely human.

"I guess you got a great pride about your husband, ain't you, Mrs. Ellison?"

"Yes, I am very proud of him."

"He's a genius, that boy: a genius. Pos-i-*ti.e*-ly. Every number a hit and every hit a record-breaker. I guess you and him has got more'n you ever expected to have, hey?"

"Yes." She did not know that there was a queer wistfulness in her tone. "I guess we have."

"*Ack!*" He turned suddenly and faced her: his kindly little eyes gleamed understandingly. "So-o. It's that way, is it?"

"What way?" She looked up, startled. He patted her hand.

"It's goin' to be all right, Mrs. Ellison. With a smart boy like Con, it's bound to be all right. Don't you worry. Of course it ain't only natural that all this here success should turn his head a little bit. But he's a good boy, Mrs. Ellison; an' I guess any boy which has got the genius he has, ain't such a damn fool he wouldn't appreciate a little wife like you."

They faced each other without speaking, and in the glance of mutual understanding which passed between them, Ellen knew that she had found a firm friend and a stanch ally. That knowledge helped in the dark days which followed.

SUCCESS bred success: song followed song, and each of them tickled the popular fancy. Then Con was offered one of the spot positions at a great Sunday night vaudeville concert in New York. Ellen attended, with Abe Rothstein and Abe's ponderous wife. They saw Con strut onto the stage, totally devoid of stage fright; they heard his announcement that he was the greatest popular song writer in the world and that he was about to regale them with several of his own compositions; they saw him signal his accompanist and then throw himself bodily into the syncopations of his latest sensational hit. It was as though he knew that the public would like him—that it must like him—and he gave unstintedly of himself. To use the vernacular, the audience ate it up. He was, in theatrical parlance, a riot. As Abe Rothstein finished applauding, he turned to the girl at his side; then he touched her arm.

"Don't you go to cryin', Mrs. Ellison. Things ain't so bad as they might be."

"I'm not crying about that. . . . I'm just a little fool—"

"I understand," he said softly. "I guess I got an unusually good understanding."

"Yes," she nodded. "I believe you have."

The day following, Con accepted three weeks of Broadway circuit time, headlining two of the bills and holding a feature spot in the third—the biggest vaudeville house in the country. They paid him five hundred dollars a week and within four days of his first week he developed all the temperament of an old-time vaudeville headliner.

He wrote two more numbers: both were successful. And with the astounding repetition of his triumphs, he came to be the center of a loud-mouthed crowd who believed he was the greatest man in Broadway, and had no hesitancy in telling him so.

He dressed as he had always wanted to dress: extreme clothes, handsomely tailored. His haberdashery was howling in its loudness, but Con thought it wonderful. He was the outstanding figure of a wild crowd: women made much of him; they petted and flattered him and he could not have resisted them had he tried. But it was not in the man to avoid the spotlight; he frankly loved it—and the quiet eyes of his wife were vaguely disturbing: he didn't like to be near them. He didn't know why; but, as he expressed it, they got his goat.

Not once did she remonstrate; not once did she register an objection to the life he was living. She was reasonably certain that he was a moral man, she knew that even yet he had not become addicted to liquor. He was weak, too weak to know that the adulation in which he basked was of his accomplishment rather than of himself.

It was inevitable that he should realize the impossibility of his domestic conditions. The idea of a man of his prominence always ill at ease before his wife! The other women he knew thought he was the swellest feller in the world and they told him so freely and unreservedly. There was one girl in particular—great little ol' kid, she was; and some pumpkins of a dancer. Now if she only ever got her chance in the two-a-day, or a great musical comedy! There was a frail who had confidence in his ability: she wanted him to write a musical comedy in which she could be starred. What a knockout, eh? Great idea! Matter of fact, what a perfect team they'd make! Alongside of Freda Jocelyn, Ellen was a back number. Freda was a live one, a peppy kid. Oh, boy!

THE Freda Jocelyn complex, too, was inevitable. Ellen felt no personal animosity against Freda. It just happened; had it not been Freda, it would have been some other woman. But the night that Con came to her and told her he wanted a divorce in order that he might marry Freda, Ellen knew that she had been wrong in believing that she was beyond the point of being hurt by him.

"We just don't hit it off together," he explained awkwardly. "We ain't the same kind, that's all. I guess you've done your best—well, if you have, so have I. You needn't worry about the alimony: we'll settle all that in advance. There just ain't a bit of sense in us staying tied up to one another."

She had anticipated the blow and fought it all out in advance. She knew Freda Jocelyn: knew Freda's type—no more vicious than Con himself was vicious; but empty, thoughtless, living always in the present. She was just the type of girl who would spell ruination for Con: she'd suck him dry. This was the time Con needed her. He might not want her, but he needed her, and so she shook her head slowly.

"No, Con; I won't divorce you."

"What?" He was dumfounded.

"I won't divorce you, and you can't divorce me. I understand about Miss Jocelyn; and I understand you even better. I think we'd better not get a divorce."

He raved. He stamped up and down the tiny living-room. He called her unjust and unreasonable. He told her everything he could think of—but he couldn't quite bring himself to the point of declaring that he did not love her. That, somehow, would have seemed sacrilege. But before he stormed out of the apartment he informed her that, divorce or no divorce, he wasn't going to live with her any longer. He was through, finished and done. She couldn't—or wouldn't—live his life, and he'd be just everlastingly gosh-darned if he'd live hers. They were through with each other; and when she came to her senses about that divorce thing she could send for him.

So he left her; but bitter as the scene had been, it did not carry the sting which had been hers the night he signed his contract with Exclusive. It was on that day she had lost him; and this was merely evidence of her loss.

The little music shop assumed a new significance. She was very glad that she had never sold it out or closed its doors. It gave her a feeling of independence: it afforded the possibility of fighting her battle in her own way. She was very grateful indeed that economic necessity could not force capitulation. But it was hard to return night after night to the apartment where she had been so happy with him; she remembered the thousand and one little touches which she had put there in the effort to make a home which he would love, and which would bring him back to her.

CONRAD leased an elaborate place and furnished it with shrieking ornateness. Money meant nothing to him now—he had more than he knew what to do with: the future did not bother him at all. His confidence in himself was superb. He had everything—but he wasn't happy.

Frankly, he was unable to understand Ellen. She apparently had made no slightest effort to adjust herself to the new order of things. There wasn't anything radically wrong with her, but she just didn't have his speed. And so, fired with the zest of his new independence, he rapidly developed into a picturesque figure in certain Rialto circles. He was constantly surrounded by mealy-mouthed courtiers who applauded the manner in which he strutted his stuff.

Approbation did not pall upon him. His long, lanky figure was to be seen everywhere that night life flourished; he was the gayest member of any party—and he was a liberal spender. His own ornate apartment knew many wild evenings. Yet he continued to succeed. In vaudeville circles he was more than a little in demand. Once or twice Ellen went to the theater to watch him and inevitably she came away somewhat heartsick, for she saw no change from the carefree, thoughtless man who could not stand success nor probe beneath the surface of his friends' sincerity.

Ellen became morose. Months passed and there came no overture from Con. If he was discontented, he gave no evidence of that fact. She spent evening after evening alone, in silent communion. She wondered whether she was being fair to him in refusing the divorce he wished. If they were to continue to live apart, her attitude was patently unfair, and she loved him too genuinely to be unfair. It was only that she felt his absolute freedom would be the worst thing in the world for him: she felt, without egotism, that he needed her. The separation itself was a bitter pain, but divorce would be worse. She knew the man, knew that the minute a decree was granted he would marry some other woman—if not Freda Jocelyn, then another girl of the type; and that would mark the end.

She was not jealous of Freda or of any other woman: it was merely that the irrevocability of marriage to one of them frightened her. Con did not have the stuff with which to come back. As a matter of fact what he needed now was misfortune. Things had been coming his way too easily. He needed a lesson. . . . Suddenly her eyes widened and she rose abruptly and crossed to the window. It always helped her to think when she could gaze down into the street.

The following day she called at the office of Exclusive and sent in her card to Abe Rothstein. He dismissed a man with whom he was discussing an important business matter, and bade her enter. As the door closed behind her, he hoisted his great, ungainly figure from the swivel chair and waddled across the room, both hands extended in unmistakably hearty greeting.

"Well, if it ain't my little friend, Mrs. Ellison. I'm awful glad to see you, Mrs. Ellison. Have a seat, huh—and tell me all about it."

She seated herself. It was not difficult to talk to this man: she knew that he would understand. And so she came straight to the point.

"You know, of course, that Con and I have been separated for months?"

"Yeh. Yeh, I know that—sure. And I ain't sayin' that Con ain't a good song writer, y'understand; but he certainly is foolish when it comes to not appreciating a fine little wife like you. He certainly is."

She met his eyes squarely. "I love my husband, Mr. Rothstein: I cannot help but feel that he loves me. If he doesn't then I am wrong not to grant him his freedom; if I am right, then it is a shame that we should continue to live as we are. So I've come to you for advice and for help."

He rubbed moist palms together. "Ain't I told you once, Mrs. Ellison, that I was your friend? You just go right ahead and tell me all the things you're thinking."

She did. She started in a slow, embarrassed manner and gradually lost her reserve in the realization of this man's vast comprehension.

IT WAS a great favor Ellen was asking him, a stupendous, impossible thing from a business standpoint; but he inspired her with the courage to request the impossible—and he granted it with regal readiness. There were tears in her eyes as she took his hand.

"You are wonderful, Mr. Rothstein. I'll never forget."

"Shuh! It ain't nothin'—really. Just a little favor. And I guess I owe Con something anyway, don't I? Now you run along home, and if this thing don't work, why, I guess the best thing you got to do is be sorry."

That evening she telephoned Con at the hour she knew he would be home dressing for dinner. She thrilled to the note of eagerness which she fancied was in his voice, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she made her tone calm and impersonal. She told him briefly that she wished him to be at her apartment not later than seven-thirty.

"But Ellen, I've got a heavy date for tonight."

"By seven-thirty, Con." And she hung up the receiver.

It was an agonizing wait, but at seven-thirty the buzzer sounded and she let him into the apartment. She wanted to cry at sight of him: tall and lean and graceful—in the latest cut of dinner jacket, a too-large white flower in his buttonhole; hat set at a rakish angle. She could see too that he was quite pleased with the appearance he made. She led the way into the tiny living-room. Her face was chalky and her voice came with difficulty.

"Con," she said, "I understand that you are considering four weeks of vaudeville time."

"I'll say. I'm an awful hit—"

She did not equivocate. "You are not to accept it."

"What?" He sat up very straight. "Say! Ellen—"

"You are not to accept that vaudeville engagement, or any other, during the term of your contract with Exclusive."

He laughed. "Aw! Say, Kid—ain't that stepping kind of lively? What have you got to do with—"

"Furthermore, Con"—the words were flowing a trifle more easily now—"I may as well tell you that you have published your last song under that contract. As a song writer and as a vaudeville artist you are through so long as that contract lasts."

A tense silence fell between them. The supercilious, amused smile died slowly from his lips. He met her level, serious eyes and knew that a whip was being cracked. He did not understand how or why. The thing was absurd on the face of it; but unquestionably she knew whereof she spoke.

"Suppose you tell me what all these wise cracks mean, Ellen."

In answer, she extended for his inspection a formal document. "That, Con, is an assignment to Mrs. Conrad Ellison of your contract with Exclusive. For eight years you are tied up with me. Either I publish your songs or no one publishes them. You will fill vaudeville engagements only when I say so—if I do. And it means this, Con: I'm not going to publish your songs and I'm not going to grant permission for stage appearances. Your career is ended."

He knew the girl: he did not question the accuracy of her statements, amazing as they were. "How—how did you get that contract?" he asked painfully.

"From Mr. Rothstein."

"The dirty bum!"

"No!" Her voice cracked sharply across the room. "He is a great man, Con. He understands."

THE lean lower jaw drooped pathetically. "You ain't really gonna crab me just when I'm started? You ain't really gonna do that, are you, Ellen?"

"Yes."

Then he became angry. "So this is the way you hit back at me, is it? Swell wife, you are—stabbing me in the back like this! I guess I might have expected it. . . . Well, anyway, it don't go: see? I'm gonna consult my lawyer—I reckon he'll know how to get around that. He'll fix it—"

"The best contract lawyers in New York have already been consulted, Con. The assignment is valid."

The man stared. There was a deep hurt —and a new respect—in his eyes. He couldn't understand, but he did sense that there was something beneath it all. The thing was inconceivable. He winced in the face of disaster. Why, the thing would make him a laughing-stock!

"What do you want?" he snarled. "What do you expect to get out of this?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing! Huh! I guess I'm sap enough to believe that. Well, whatever you think you're gonna get—you ain't gonna get it. God! I never thought you'd do me this way. I thought you was in love with me—"

"Did you really think so, Con?"

"Yeh—" His voice trailed off, and a queer, puzzled expression crossed his face. "Ain't you?"

A warm glow suffused her at his tone. "Does *this* look like it?" She designated the contract in her hand.

"No, it don't. I'll say. But"—again that note of doubt crept into his voice— "I would have sworn that you cared *something*."

He left her then and the next day had a stormy and thoroughly unsatisfactory interview with Abe Rothstein. He then visited his lawyer and handed over to that gentleman's inspection a copy of the assignment from Rothstein to Ellen. The verdict was discouraging.

For a week she did not see him; neither, for that matter, did many of his cronies. He retired to the seclusion of his apartment and for the first time in his life gave himself over to the unnatural effort of sustained thought.

He could not understand, but he did grope for a meaning. One thing he did know, and that was that he was licked. He had never thought it of Ellen. Why, he thought she loved him! It was amazing to learn that she didn't. Gosh! That was funny. It occurred to him that perhaps he hadn't been entirely fair to Ellen. It was a new angle of thought: Con had never been prone to criticize himself.

OF COURSE things couldn't go on this way. Too, his pride was hurt at the idea that she no longer cared. He determined grimly that he would not go to her, but he went just the same; appeared at the music store one morning trying to look debonair and resembling only a little boy who has been soundly whipped and is trying to conceal the fact from his friends.

Much of his cocksure jauntiness was gone. He was depressed and tractable.

"Here I am, Ellen."

"Yes."

"What do you want me to do?"

She looked up in surprise. "Nothing."

"Nothing? Don't you want to publish any songs of mine? I've got one swell number—"

"No, Con. You're through as a song writer."

The narrow shoulders sagged. But he did not protest.

"You don't love me any more, do you, Ellen?"

She raged against the hot flush which dyed her cheeks. "I don't think you have any right to ask that."

He stared at her for a moment. "No-o; I don't guess I have. But it didn't seem like you could or you wouldn't be doing me this way."

"That's so. . . . It doesn't seem as though I still love you, does it?"

"I'll say not. But I can't understand it; you used to think I was something great. Now listen, Ellen—"

"I'd rather not talk of the past, Con. Suppose you run along. . . ."

But he did not run along. Instead he hovered uncertainly about the doorway. A few minutes later a customer came in and asked for a certain popular number. Impulsively Con elbowed his way to the piano, flipped open the pages of the desired song, rippled his long fingers over the keyboard and sent his sweet, nasal tenor echoing through the shop. Nor did he see his wife turn suddenly away and hurry toward the little room in the rear where she might clear the mist from her eyes.

NOTHING was ever definitely said between them, but Con remained in the shop. When those of the neighbors who knew him came in to buy, he summoned a pitiful bravado and tried to make them believe that he was doing the store a great favor by condescending to work there for a while—just helping a poor thing along by his greatness. Alone with Ellen, however, his attitude contained nothing of braggadocio. When he fancied he was unobserved, he sat on the piano stool and followed her with his eyes. He was doing a great deal of thinking these days—and he was learning many things which hitherto had been unsuspected.

No personalities were indulged in: they did not discuss the bizarre situation. Between them there was a scrupulous politeness which amounted almost to formality: neither quite understood the other, and both were considerably in doubt as to themselves.

Con was a pathetic figure, but he was game. Only he knew how he suffered; and he did not cringe. Whatever his mental processes, whatever end he had in mind, he kept to himself; and now it was Ellen who grew puzzled and ill at ease.

It was a situation which could not continue indefinitely: it was too unnatural—and there had been too much between them in the past. But it was Ellen who broke and not Con; it was she who recognized the impossibility and the hopelessness of the thing. There was nothing else she could do. At least there was some satisfaction in the knowledge that for one month he had forsaken the companionship which had so injured him—but she couldn't see that the new order of things had effected any material change. True, he was subdued and somber—and he was different: but this could not go on. She saw with greater clarity that it was unfair to him, and so, one month exactly from the day he had come back to the shop, she went to him. They were alone in the store.

"You just received an offer for a Sunday night concert, didn't you, Con?"

"Yes."

"Well—you may accept it."

He rose abruptly from the piano bench. "You mean it?"

"Yes."

"Doggone! Say, Ellen! That's white of you." His face was transformed. On the instant much of his old joyousness returned. "Gee! I'm much obliged—"

She turned away. "Let's don't discuss it, Con."

Saturday afternoon she mentioned the subject once again. She had been thinking a great deal that week: there were dark circles of sleeplessness under her eyes, and she was tired—very, very tired.

"Stop by the apartment Sunday evening, will you, Con? I want to have a little chat with you. I won't keep you long."

He nodded quietly. Sunday evening she saw him leave a taxi in front of the modest apartment house. A hopeless light came into her eyes at sight of him, for she saw that he was the same old Con. The natty suit was there and the yellow overcoat and gloves, with cane to match, and he wore a huge chrysanthemum in his buttonhole. He was again in his element.

ELLEN had fought her battle and knew that she had lost. After all, it had been a hopeless fight; waiting for the sound of the buzzer, she knew that her final decision was the right one.

He breezed into the apartment. "Hello, Kid!"—his old-time jauntiness. "Say, I got you a couple of third-row seats. How about drifting down there tonight?"

"No—" She choked.

"Aw, say! Why don't you look in on the show?"

"What's the use?"

"Use a plenty." She realized with surprise that he, too, was embarrassed. "I want you to—that's the use."

She shook her head. "No, Con—I can't go. And there's something else I want you to know before you leave here: You're free, Con. You see, I know now that nothing has been gained. You are you, and I can't make you over: nobody can. So tomorrow I'm going to destroy that contract assignment from Mr. Rothstein. You can go ahead with your song writing, and he'll publish the numbers. You can accept all the vaudeville engagements you want—"

He was staring at her queerly.

"And the important thing, Con, is this: You want to divorce me. For some absurd reason I refused to grant the divorce. Well, I've changed my mind. You can have your freedom whenever you want." She crossed to the window. "Now please go, Con: I'd rather we didn't talk any more this evening."

But Conrad Ellison didn't go. There was a new light in his eyes, and in his brain a crystallization of the thoughts which had been puzzling him so during the last six weeks. He was no more analytic than before; but his instinct was at work and Conrad Ellison was essentially a creature of instinct. He didn't call it instinct—he described his impulses as hunches. And Con had a hunch right now.

He rose slowly, and slowly he crossed the room. He had a hunch that there was a great hunger in his heart; he had a hunch that he had treated Ellen horribly; he had an overpowering, irresistible hunch that he wanted to take her in his arms as he had done the night when they came to this apartment as bride and groom. . . .

He played his hunch. His face was dead-white and his elongated body was trembling violently as he swung her forcibly about so that her tired, wistful eyes met his squarely.

"Ellen," he started. Then his lips went dry and all he could say was, "Oh, Ellen!"

She stood rigidly before him, afraid to believe the evidence of her senses. Nor did she quite believe when Con slipped suddenly to his knees, encircled her waist with his arms and broke into sobs.

"Oh, honey! I've been so awful wrong. And I've been so dumb—thinking that I didn't love you any more—"

Ellen knew that she had won: won gloriously when drab defeat seemed inevitable. She placed her hands on the long, wavy hair of her husband and her light kiss told him that he was forgiven.

They sat side by side on the lounge. The room was shrouded in darkness; no word broke the magic silence. Her tiny hand was held tight in his big one, her shoulder resting gently against his.

It was she who remembered the time. She crossed the room to the electric button. "You must go, Con: you'll be late."

RELUCTANTLY he donned overcoat and hat. Then, at the door, he turned. His face was flushed and his eyes wavered uncertainly. It was the first time she had seen real embarrassment in his manner. Although his voice was very low, she missed no single syllable of his request.

"I'm going now, dear," he said. "But—I—I just want to know if you'll let me come back after the show. I want to come back to you—"

She put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him.

"Whenever you come to me, Con," she said softly, "you will find me waiting."

A Love Story of the Undisciplined Present

March Winds

By Francis R. Bellamy

QUITE a while ago Francis R. Bellamy wrote a story for EVERYBODY'S called "A Flash of Gold"—a story that left its impress. Mr. Bellamy has now written a novel equally good if not better. As his theme he has chosen the undisciplined present—what is going on in this age of unbridled emotion. Being a good story-teller, he does not attempt to tell you what will come of it, but he does give you a faithful, therefore absorbing, picture of life. Nothing is more interesting than life.

December *Everybody's* Out November 15

Adventures of a Tramp on Horseback

Their Island

Volstock Finds That There Is Something Behind an Old Argentine Superstition, and Escapes Death by a Hair

By Arthur Mills

AS FAR as the eye could see the grazing lands stretched desolate. There was something terrible in the sight of the great estate in the grip of drought; thousands of cattle listlessly lying by the river bank; mile after rolling mile of brown parched soil; sky sultry blue; artesian wells silent; the very trees drooping and faint.

Donato scanned the sky, looking for the signs we all wanted.

"How much longer can the cattle live?" I asked.

The old gaucho looked at some steers huddled under the shade of a paraisu tree; he took no notice of the question; it was evident that the cattle could not live long. They had grazed along the river where alone there was still a rim of green, till nothing remained. Now the only fodder was on an island in midstream, where a few trees rose from a carpet of thick undergrowth. I pointed to the island.

Donato shook his head. "No, señor, the cattle will not go there. The peons themselves do not care to go to the island."

We were abreast the place, and I could see among the trees what appeared to be the remains of some sort of dwelling.

"But some one lived there once. See, there has been a house."

"A temple," Donato corrected me. "You know, señor, before the Spaniards came the Indians lived in these parts; they had their gods which they worshiped in a fashion of their own." He spoke contemptuously, though himself of half Indian blood.

We rode on in silence till we came to the pulpería. I longed to ask the old man more about the island to which the cattle would not go. But it was useless to hustle him. When he had had his maté Donato might or might not talk.

Arrived at the pulpería, we settled ourselves at a table under a tree. The week's work had been hard, and the peons lay about on the ground, sleeping heavily. Near by a man was stretched on his poncho, his head resting on his saddle, one arm crooked behind his neck. His chest rose and fell evenly with his breathing; he was sleeping like a man drunk or drugged, his face completely hidden by his hat pulled over his eyes.

Leonita, the proprietor's daughter, came out to ask our wants. I had often noticed the girl's slim figure and dark, eloquent eyes. In a land where women are scarce, and the fall of the *taba* (hock-bone of a steer with which the peons gamble) enough cause for killing, she caught the eye. Old Gomez, her father, was a rich man, as all camp storekeepers are. This was some safeguard, placing Leonita above the peons and men from the "camp" who would otherwise have fought for her.

Donato ordered cana, but in the meanwhile took the bowl of maté Leonita had brought. No doubt in the great heat the scalding, bitter tea was a splendid beverage, but, abominating maté myself, I was content to let Donato suck the *bombilla*. When he had finished, he set his bowl down by his side.

"That island about which you asked me, señor."

"Oh, yes!" I said off-handedly.

Donato looked mistrustfully at the peon on the ground. I stirred the man with my foot. "*Holá!*" I called; then louder, "*Holá!*" The fellow grunted, flinging his other arm behind his head, his hat tilting farther forward over his face.

"He hears nothing we say," I assured Donato.

The old gaucho still seemed reluctant to begin.

Afterward, when he had ended, I understood his reasons. For it was a strange tale Donato told—a story of the days when the Indians flourished where the Estancia St. Martin now stood. He could himself remember the last survivors of the tribe, of whom he was a direct descendant.

"IT IS not good to talk of treasure to a Spaniard, señor," the old man finished. "In the old days, to learn what I have told you, the Spaniards would have tortured many people. And after all it may only be a fairy tale."

"But has no one ever been to the island to find out?" I asked.

"No, señor; no living thing goes over to that island. Even when the Indians were here the men of the tribe never went across. Only the priests lived over there. And what they did I cannot tell you. Nor do I know whether the green stones which the tribe were said to possess are really buried there. It would be strange if they are, for an island is a little thing, altering much in shape, and it is many years since the Spaniards first came up the Parana."

Donato finished his cana and rose. "Remember, señor, I have told no one the things I have told you." He jerked his thumb contemptuously at the peon lying on the ground. "They would believe it and fight among themselves. But you, señor, may find the story of some service." As he spoke a mischievous twinkle lit his eyes. My profession had been explained to him, and though the old boy could neither read nor write, at various times he showed a remarkably quick comprehension of my requirements.

Still, even if he had invented the story of the buried emeralds, the fact remained that there was an island in the middle of the river, on which the remains of an old Indian temple stood, that the peons had a superstitious dread of this island; and that even in the middle of a drought the cattle would not swim over there to graze.

I lit a pipe and sat watching the retreating back of Donato rolling across the patio as well as his great spurs permitted. Who could say what was true or untrue in this unknown continent to the heart of which no Stanley or Livingstone had penetrated?

I WAS still reflecting when a voice at my knee called "*Che!*" Now this word has a peculiarly friendly, intimate meaning, and such a greeting would not have been used by an ordinary peon to a stranger staying on the estate. Yet it was the peon who had been asleep close to us who had spoken.

"What's the time, *Che?*" asked the man, speaking from under the hat.

But of course I knew now who it was; no need to wait till the hat was removed.

"Volstock!" I exclaimed.

The Russian sat up, rubbing his eyes.

It was several weeks since I had seen this queer fish about whom no one knew anything, except that he had come out to South America to work on the great cattle ranches as men from many countries do. He had never told me anything about himself, though I felt he treated me more nearly as a friend than any one else in his adventurous life. He was evidently of good family, and I fancied had once been rich; but like all the Russians he would gamble with anything he possessed—his week's pay, his saddlery, his horse when he happened to have a good one, which, being a judge of such matters, he generally had.

I looked at the light blue eyes. There was a mildness in them which made it difficult to believe only two months before he had shot a man dead near the very tree under which we were sitting.

Volstock's next question startled me:

"Do you think what the old man said about the emeralds was true?"

So he had not been sleeping at all, but had heard every word of my conversation with Donato. And now, as he looked at me, I saw his expression change. There was a glitter in his eyes, a tenseness about his lips.

"Listen!" He came close. "There may be something in this story; those old Indian chiefs had some wonderful jewels. Even today no one knows what mines there are still undiscovered in the Andes. You have heard of the lost valley of emeralds! Books and stories have been written about it in every language. These stones may come from there, and if they do—" Volstock laughed. "Well, it will be a better day's work to find a pocketful than look after cattle at forty dollars a month. Yes, *Che*, we will drink a glass of cana together and ride down to the island tomorrow."

While Volstock talked Leonita had come quietly up behind. She interrupted, speaking in the quick, unrestrained manner of her people.

"No, you do not go to the island, I say."

"Hullo!" Volstock looked up. "Where did you spring from?"

"It is no good, that island; every one knows that."

Leonita's dark eyes watched Volstock's face. "Why do you go?" she asked.

I looked at Volstock; his face had become once more expressionless. He nodded in my direction.

"Ask the señor here."

This was grossly unfair. Leonita turned to me eagerly, though I knew she cared nothing if I went to the island or not.

"There is an old temple there," I said, "that I wish to see."

"But it is nothing, only bits of the walls; besides, you have been here several months, and now suddenly you want to go there!"

"Well, I have never had any one to go with before."

"And so you persuade him."

"*Persuade!* I do not persuade—"

Volstock interrupted. "No, he did not persuade me; it was I who suggested it. But why should we not go?"

"Because it is a bad place. Even Pedro, who fears nothing, said he would not go."

"Pedro!" Volstock sneered. "He is afraid perhaps of being bitten by a *vizcacha*" (little wild dog that lives on the "camp").

It had always been a mystery to me how Volstock's insolence had not cost him his life. Pedro was one of the most noted fighters in the district. If the remark were repeated to him, Volstock might never go to any island at all. However, that was the Russian's way—to shout things other men would not have dared to whisper; and somehow he got away with it.

Leonita looked at him with admiration. She adored this slim, young man, whose skin was so much fairer than the other peons', and who gave her the most lovely silk handkerchiefs.

Now I saw Donato returning. Feeling that to go to the island without telling him would be a breach of confidence, I beckoned him over.

The old horse-tamer listened to Volstock's plan. I could feel Volstock's excitement as he asked Donato questions. The treasure lust that lies just below the surface of every white man's skin possessed him wholly. Donato was conscious of this and secretly amused by it; his forefathers had had ample chance to see where such ambitions led. Were there not today the bones of Spanish adventurers lying in every part of South America?

"But go, señor, by all means," Donato said. "What I have told you may only be an old man's tale."

So we arranged to set out next morning. Personally I attributed the uncanny dread of the island entirely to local superstition. On the other hand I put no great faith in Donato's "emerald" story. It was unlikely, even if there ever had been any emeralds buried, that they had been allowed to remain on the island undisturbed all these years. In any event it would be interesting to see the old temple, which I fancied in that superstitious land was actually the cause of all the talk.

That night I remember as the most airless in the year. Gomez had given me a shakedown in his store, which, being roofed with tin and baked by the sun all day, at dusk became a human oven. The mosquitoes made sleeping outside impossible, and there was nothing for it but to lie on one's bed letting the perspiration drip from one's forehead to the pillow.

DAWN broke on a sere, sun-weary land. Volstock and I ate some cooked meat, drank some tea which came oozing from every pore of our bodies as soon as swallowed, and set out.

Looking at the sky, Volstock prophesied a storm. There were dark clouds on the horizon and the air was heavy. But for days now there had been dark clouds about, yet the tormenta which would have saved the cattle never came.

We came to the river bank, made neat bundles of our clothes and secured them between our horses' ears. Then, after loosening the saddle girths, we drove the horses into the water. The animals, trained to swim since colts, plunged boldly out into the stream, towing us by their tails. We were nearing the island, which lay some one hundred and fifty yards from shore, when I saw Volstock in difficulties with his horse. Then my own horse tried to turn. I could not understand, for an animal's instinct in water is to make for the nearest land. Then a chill seized me. I remembered Donato had said no cattle would swim across to the island.

Volstock, jumping on his horse's back, forced the animal in the required direction, and we landed safely. We then tied the horses to a couple of trees and set out to explore.

The island was some hundred yards long, by fifty wide; the caked character of the ground near the water's edge showed that when the river was in flood only the central portion of the island was uncovered. It was here, in the center, that we found the remains of the temple. The walls had crumbled so that they were nowhere higher than the undergrowth, and in some parts level with the ground. The place had a desolate, oppressive air, and I hoped Volstock would lose no time in carrying out his search. He had brought spades from the estancia, and at his suggestion we began to dig up the floor of the temple.

We had removed a few feet of earth when I heard the ring of a spade on stone, and Volstock called me over. Plainly enough at his feet, where he had cleared away the earth, there was a layer of masonry. I suggested it was probably the original floor of the temple. Volstock thought not. He struck the stone with his spade and asked me if I did not think it rang hollow.

"There is another room below here, *Che*," he said, immensely excited.

WE WORKED feverishly, clearing away the earth. Then the tormenta, which had been drawing up all night, broke. Never do I remember such a storm, great peals of thunder, lightning covering half the sky, trees swaying, branches crashing, and over all the mighty whisper of the rustling leaves. The rain fell as though the whole heavens were one vast tilted bucket, splashing on to the parched ground.

Volstock stopped his work and listened.

"Something is upsetting the horses, *Che*, maybe the lightning."

I, too, could hear the horses squealing.

He put down his spade and ran out of the temple. I followed him.

As we came to the clearing where we had left the horses we saw a horrid spectacle. Volstock's horse lay dragged to the ground in the coils of an enormous snake. My horse, half mad with fear, tugged at his head-stall, kicking, plunging, rearing, fighting frantically, to break away. The monstrous size of the snake was evident from the fact it had been able to throw its coils completely round the horse's belly. Never in any zoological gardens or museum had I seen a snake of similar size.

"What is it?" I asked Volstock.

"Anaconda," he said laconically; "at least that's what they call 'em out here. I don't know what they are really; sort of water snake, you don't often see 'em. Maybe this bad weather's driven him ashore; well, he's finished my horse anyway. Let's get the other nag away, and come back and attend to him."

We led the horse up to the high ground near the temple wall, and returned to deal with the snake. The wretched horse was by now dead; indeed one squeeze of those fearful coils had been enough.

The great anaconda lay twined round its prey, evil and sinister. Volstock drew his revolver.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Shove this down his ugly throat." Volstock tapped his revolver.

Next moment I felt a blow on the shoulder, stumbled, and found Volstock dragging me rapidly along the pathway.

"Whew!" he said. "That was a near thing; he'd have got you if I hadn't pushed you out of the way."

"Got me?" I asked. "What?"

"There was another of them there—just by that tree, bigger than the first; spect it's his mate; we just want to watch where we are stepping."

We approached the clearing. Coming into view of the dead horse I stopped short. Three huge snakes now lay coiled on the grass, and as we stood there two more slithered out of the water. They were monsters, all of them—bigger than the first. The hunter's instinct thrilled me as I realized I was seeing with my own eyes the fabulously large Central American snakes, of which I had heard.

"No wonder the cattle don't swim out here to graze," said Volstock. "This island seems what you might call inhabited. Well, it's no use staying here; seeing us might make 'em feel hungry."

We made our way back to the ruins of the temple. With the river rising, and one horse dead, there was no chance at present of making shore.

Volstock accepted the situation philosophically.

"Well, we are stuck here for a bit," he said, taking up his spade; "we may as well see what is under here as anything else."

FOR some while we worked away clearing the earth from the stones. On my part I found it hard to keep from looking over my shoulder. Any moment I expected to see the evil head and thick glistening neck of one of the great water snakes over the wall.

Volstock, absorbed in his task, seemed to have forgotten all about them.

"Look here!" he exclaimed after several minutes' work.

I went across, and found him standing over a great square stone that had an iron ring set in the middle. He bent down, seized the ring with both hands, and pulled with all his might. I lent a hand; under the combined weight of the two of us the stone moved.

I began to catch something of Volstock's excitement. Suppose we really did find the emeralds of which Donato had spoken!

One more tug and the stone moved again; a final effort and it came away. We found ourselves looking into an opening about four feet square. The opening was completely dark. Volstock lit a stump of candle, knelt and held the light in the mouth of the hole.

"It is only a few feet drop," he said. "Can you manage that?"

"Not if there are any blamed snakes down there," I answered firmly.

Volstock laughed. "As far as I can see, it is just a sort of empty cellar. I'm going to have a look, anyway." So saying, he dropped down through the hole.

I followed him, liking the enterprise less each minute. We found ourselves in a narrow chamber about twenty feet long; this we proceeded to examine as well as the light of the candle enabled us.

The first thing we came upon were some curious drawings on the wall. The drawings appeared to be of a man and a species of large serpent. The man was squatting on the ground with a bowl between his knees from which the serpent was drinking, while the man's right hand rested caressingly on the reptile's neck.

"Looks to me like some sort of snake-charmer chap," said Volstock, looking at the picture curiously, "and by Jove, yes! Look! Here's the bowl he used to feed his pet from. See, it is just the same shape as the one in the picture." He held up an old wooden bowl.

"My sainted aunt!" Volstock stopped dead.

So did I, and I don't mind admitting my heart nearly stopped as well. A few yards from Volstock, lying against the wall, was a snake by the side of which the ones on the bank looked mere eels. I hesitate to make an estimate of its girth round the middle. To my horror Volstock walked up to the snake and kicked its belly.

"All right," he called; "it's only an old skin. Hullo!" He listened. "Quick, give me a leg up! *They* are after that horse of yours."

I helped him out of the cellar and scrambled back to daylight myself. Both of us set out at a run. We did not need to go far. My poor horse had been dragged to the ground, and as we arrived the last signs of life were being squeezed from him in a terrible embrace. But now, instead of one or even two or three snakes, there were fully a score. The island seemed alive with them—huge loathsome brutes, some coiled placidly, others slithering round the horse.

VOLSTOCK and I looked at each other. I think the same thought flashed through each of our minds. *What would be the next object of attack after the horses?*

The question was quickly answered. One snake, bigger than all the others, slowly uncoiled. Foot by foot the great body straightened, and in leisurely, ghastly fashion it approached.

Instinctively we both stepped back. The

snake increased its pace, and now another moved and then another.

We withdrew to the temple. At best it was only a temporary measure. We were trapped on that island as surely as ever a wretched rabbit thrust into the glass case of a zoo.

Watching the snakes approach, I was seized by a queer kind of fascination. It seemed to me I was hardly living through a real experience. A grip on my arm made me start. Volstock was beside me. For the first time since I had known him his face was white.

"It's no use standing there like a stuck pig, man," he said sharply. "Come on!"

Yes, but where? We retreated across the courtyard and climbed on to the highest bit of wall there was.

The big snake that was leading slithered through the gateway. Both of us knew that the wall on which we were standing was no protection at all. On it came till it was in the middle of the yard. Suddenly it hesitated. It had come to the opening of the cellar below.

What smell floated up to it from there, what mysterious link with its own kind, we shall never know. But suddenly the brute seemed to lose all interest in us. For a few moments it hovered over the dark opening; then thrust its head in; gave a queer wriggling motion so that half its body followed; finally with a flick of the tail entirely disappeared.

And so the next, and the next, and the one after. It was the oddest, weirdest sight imaginable. Great snake after great snake entering the temple and slithering into darkness through that open hole.

Volstock sat there calmly counting them, and when the last had disappeared walked over and kicked the stone back into its place.

THAT really is the end of the story, for we never found those emeralds. To tell the truth, we did not go back to look for them.

Only one little fact, which I subsequently learned, may be of interest. Knowing that in old times the Indians worshiped stars, sticks, stones, rivers, and all manner of strange things, I wanted to find out the particular deity of the tribe whose temple we had visited.

Donato was reticent, holding in contempt the superstitions of his forbears. However, after a glass or two of cana, he consented to say this much:

"The god they worshiped in that temple, señor! The blessed saints may know! I do not, but I have heard men say it was a snake."

And that was all the information I could get about the lost tribe of snake-charming Indians of the Parana.

A new adventure of the tramp on horseback in December EVERYBODY'S, out November 15.

Frail Beauty

By Lew Sarett

O MOLTEN dewdrop, trembling in the light
Of dawn, and clinging to the poplar blade—
A pendent opal on a breast of jade—
How came your splendor, so limpid and so bright?
How your clear symmetry? And what weird sleight
Of art suffused you with each rainbow-shade,
Captured your evanescent beauty, and made
A quivering soul from fire and mist and night?
Fleeting your span! Yet I shall be content
To let the Cosmic Power that built in you
Such frail wet beauty, such luster opulent,
And such immortal life as lies in dew,
Fashion the fragile moment of my soul
In what frail shape it deems a perfect whole.

Probing the Minds of a Man and a Woman

The Sea Horses

Faithful in Spite of All, Mrs. Salvia Penetrates an Evil African Port to Find Her Husband. Captain Glanvil Plunges Ever Deeper into a Hopeless Maze of Love

By Francis Brett Young

Illustrations by Joseph A. Maturo

Begin this serial with any instalment. The story up to this point is here.

WITHIN the landlocked anchorage of Panda, an hour before daybreak, darkness weighed dense and palpable as a cloud; a low cloud, ebbing seaward in the last breath of the night's down-river air, moving so stealthily that the casuarina trees, whose whole existence is one tremulous commotion, gave no shiver as it passed through their invisible tresses.

The water lay void and formless, part neither of earth nor of sky, like some lake in a world scarcely created and innocent of life. The land drowsed, in a strained, conscious silence, for the moon which had lately stirred the inhabitants of swamp and shamba into an uneasy life, had set; exhausted, yet wary, it awaited the first signal of returning day.

Suddenly it came. From the flat shoals that fringed the island of Vumba a flight of flamingoes took the air. Obedient to a secret, unanimous impulse, driven from their nocturnal pasture by some feather-sense of approaching dawn, they rose and hurried landward, ruffling the coverlet of darkness with their creaking wings, waking the hushed waters in their passage. They passed, and through the torn film of silence issued a watery sound, as though the ripple of their emergence lapped the dumb roots of the mangroves. The casuarinas shuddered; the lofty plumes of the coconuts gave a dry shiver. A single bird, deep in the rubber plantations, set up a thin and plaintive piping; grasses stirred, then branches; a heavy body launched itself into the shallows with a sucking splash; and so, in an aggregation of echo on echo and restless sound on sound, the estuary awoke to a torrent of bird-song.

As yet there was no light: only a thinning in the darkness that, drifting eastward, was curled back and lifted from the lip of the horizon. Gradually, quickened by light that came from some invisible source, the margin of water detached itself from the thickness of land. It lay like an irregular pool of spilt ink in which the miracle of creation was reënacted; for, from its edges, rose fantastic shapes of earth and trees that were like monsters emerging from slime. Among these, huge against the steely levels of sea, loomed the whaleback of Vumba Island, closing the anchorage to eastward.

Moment by moment, as though the lines of the land were being boldly remodeled by the pencil of some celestial artist moving from that dark nucleus, the form of the neighboring coast became defined. On the southerly side of the strait the snout of the mainland, Ras M'zinga, thrust out like the upper jaw of a sleeping crocodile; on its extremity, a fantastic afterthought, rose the conical pillar of Vasco da Gama and the sinister bulk of the Fort of Jesus, threatening two seas. Gradually, on the flat concave of the promontory, a patch of smoky pallor resolved itself into the cubical masses of Panda itself, old, gray, desolate: a town that had died in its sleep, if, indeed, it had ever lived.

So it seemed in that unkindly light; but as night rolled sullenly backward into the fastnesses of the delta, the face of the town became less ghastly. The sun rose. Through its narrow streets warmth flowed like a returning circulation, bringing color into the blanched features of the houses, which now showed themselves plastered with pink stucco, roofed with red tiles and eyed with shuttered windows.

A bell jangled violently within a church that was all façade, fronting the Avenida da Republica; white pigeons, scared from their roosts in the belfry, fluttered out like a drift of petals. Down the center of an avenue a dog with a long curled tail dragged its hind quarters to a patch of white sand on which sun gleamed between the pillars of the mangoes. He yawned, flapped his tail, rolled over to sleep. His day had begun. The bell ceased its jangle. Inside the church a priest had begun to say mass; but the door was closed as fast as those of the pink-washed houses with their shuttered windows, and his voice seemed a lonely and feeble protest against the somnolence of centuries.

ONLY on the northern edge of the town, where high garden walls ended and the sea began, the pulse of life visibly quickened. There, on the edge of the shining harbor, a breeze was steadily filling the plumes of the casuarinas with a sound of sea breaking on fine shingle and swaying the pendent air-roots of an avenue of ficus. Beneath their shadow a single native came running with long, lithe strides, scattering, as he passed, a group of white-breasted crows that pecked and trailed their feathers in the dust. Panting, with open mouth, he turned the corner of the Avenida, and hammered at the door of one of the pink houses above which the royal arms of Portugal had been clumsily obliterated with a daub of whitewash. The door opened; another native, in a long white gown, to whom he imparted a message, appeared. Then, his day's work completed, he slunk away into the shade of the mangoes and threw himself down on the earth, still panting, within a few feet of the sleeping dog.

But from that moment Panda really awoke. All along the street shutters were opened and dark eyes peered vaguely through the iron grilles. The priest, in his long soutane, flapped over from the church like a shabby vulture, entering the house at which the messenger had knocked. A minute later, from the same door, a figure in uniform importantly emerged.

He passed along the avenue toward the sea, and behind him, at irregular intervals, the whole official population of Panda streamed downward to the shore of white sand on which boats were beached. They stood there, talking and gesticulating, pointing excitedly to the gleaming line of sea between Vumba Island and Ras M'zinga across which the bar that the early Portuguese had named Cavallos Marinhos showed a streak of broken water. Beyond it, stationary, as it seemed, in a lake of fire, the tall silhouette of a steamer was seen.

On the bridge of that steamer, the *Vega*, stood Captain Glanvil, her commander. Anxieties of many sorts possessed him. The harbor was strange to him; the channel, treacherous and shallow. Yet the impending test of his seamanship was welcome. For it was Helen Salvia who gave him the greater concern.

Ashore, in Panda, was her husband. Before her was the climax, the crisis, of the incredible voyage his reluctant complacence had enabled her to make from Naples with her child—an English girl, abandoned by her Italian husband, penniless, cast off by his family, denounced by them to him as a prostitute, yet determined, after her heroic struggle to maintain herself, to find and regain her husband.

And Glanvil—jilted, in effect, by the girl who had all through this long voyage engaged his thoughts—knew now what ever since Naples he had been resolute not to know. He loved her. In that strange clash between them the night before, they had been upon the verge of confession, one to the other, of an embrace. And from his knowledge he rebelled still, for all his instincts were opposed to it. Well—she would, in a few hours, be ashore. Life would go on.

It was over. The feeling of escape and

mastery so filled him that he was only dimly aware of an angry voice bawling through a megaphone from one of the swarm of boats that skimmed the surface like water-spiders on the *Vega's* beam.

"Portuguese flag, sir. Hoist the Portuguese flag!"

He turned to Cochran, who was standing alert beside him.

"Mr. Cochran, tell the chief officer to put up the Portuguese flag at once."

"Cannot be done, sir. We've only got the old one."

"Portuguese flag!" bellowed the megaphone.

"These dagos!" Cochran muttered. "They're changing their colors every other year."

"You cannot enter this port without the flag," the megaphone shrieked. "You cannot anchor here."

A whistle shrilled. With a thunderous rumble the anchor went down.

"Can't we!" said Cochran with a chuckle.

In a moment an excited figure in uniform had swung up a rope ladder for'ard and appeared on the bridge.

"I am the Governor of this place," he spluttered. "I am the Port Authority. I am the police. You have not hoist the Portuguese flag. It is international. Have you not read the regulations?"

"I'm sorry it can't be done, sir," Glanvil told him with the scornful politeness that his gesticulations inspired. "We don't possess the flag of the Portuguese Republic. If you recognize the old one I'll give orders for it to be hoisted."

"The old one?" The Governor shook his head. "To recognize the old one would be equivalent to a revolution."

"In that case we'd better go down to the saloon," said Glanvil.

Puffed like an angry sparrow, the official followed him. Glanvil gave him a seat and offered him whisky which he accepted without thanks.

"As you see, it is international," he repeated, scratching his unshaven chin. "A difficult point. I do not see what can be done. Unless"—a sudden inspiration made his eyes goggle—"unless I hire you one. That can be arranged."

Glanvil shook his head, with a wry smile. The whisky had begun its tranquilizing duty. The Governor relented.

"But another time—" he began.

"I hope there won't be another time," Glanvil answered grimly. He raised his glass. "Your very good health, sir," he said.

The Governor lit a cigar and found that it was good.

"It is the case of an ally, our oldest ally," he murmured. "I permit a dispensation. We dispense with formalities. You may anchor without fear."

As a symbol of this concession he grasped Glanvil's hand suddenly and wrung it.

"My name is Cardozo. An illustrious name. You are consigned to Almeida? I know it. Understand: I have nothing with Almeida to do. Nothing." He leaned forward, cocking the toe of his right boot into the hollow of his left knee. It was an apish gesture. "Listen," he said. "I know Almeida. Almeida is clever, no mistake, but Almeida sails a little too close to the wind. I am the Law. I am the Military. I warn you."

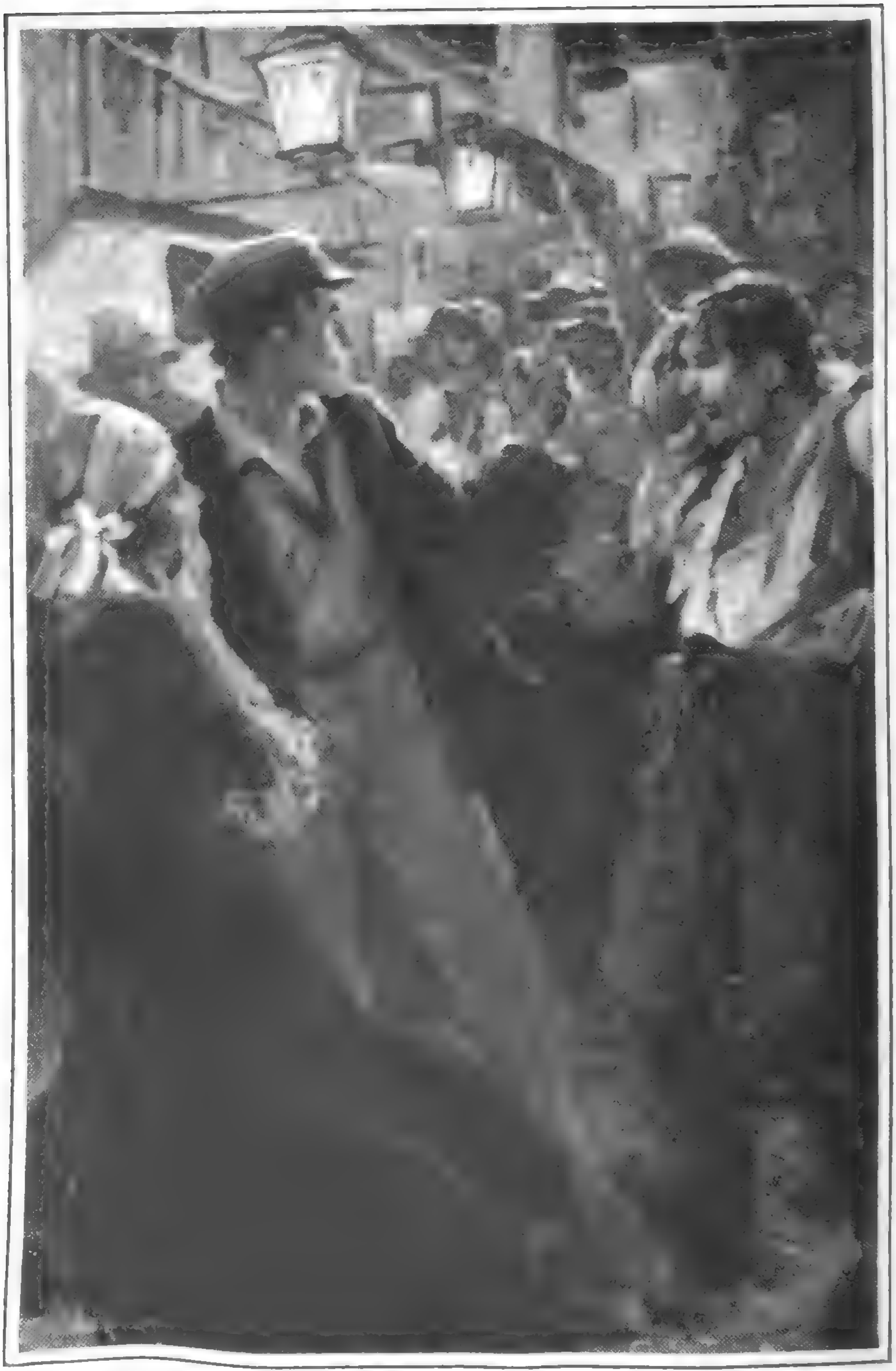
But Glanvil would not listen any longer. Almeida might be all of the unutterable things that Cardozo suggested: but that didn't alter the fact that the *Vega's* cargo was consigned to him and that time was being wasted. It was obvious that the Port Authority preferred its whisky to the papers which Glanvil now pushed toward him.

"Tomorrow," he said airily. "Tomorrow. In the case of friends there is a dispensation. Listen! If I have made it clear about that Almeida—unofficially—"

"I must trouble you," Glanvil protested, "to be official. We are still flying the yellow flag. I've a clean bill of health and I want pratique."

"Forgive me," said Cardozo benevolently, "the doctor is taking a cure at one of the railway camps. For the time being I am the Sanitary Authority. Pratique is granted. To bring disease to Panda is to bring coals to Cardiff. As for the doctor's official fee"—he took a swift glance at the negation in Glanvil's eyes—"that of course does not arise. But I incommode you?"

THIS interview had already got the better of Glanvil's sense of humor, partly because he realized that the farce in which he found himself a protagonist was being acted before a large audience which filled the mouth of the saloon doorway and trailed



Glanvil felt the arm of Mrs. Salvia contract in a spasm of terror. Her fingers clutched his, communicating an urgency of appeal he had never known.

down the alleyway outside it like a queue at a turnstile. Glanvil handled the situation with a cynicism that seemed proper to the place. He called for the chief steward.

"Mr. Rennels, will you please see that this gentleman has all he wants?" Cardozo smiled affectionately. "I must ask you to excuse me," Glanvil continued; "it is important that I should get into touch immediately with my agents." He approached the door. "Is Mr. Almeida there?" he called. "Mr. Almeida?"

An echo ran back through the crowd, dying at the end of the alleyway in whispers: "Almeida . . . Almeida . . . Almeida." In the hush that followed an energetic body propelled itself through the narrow passage until the whole of the doorway was occupied by a black ball of a man clothed in pajamas, a frock coat and a pigsticker topee beneath which appeared a pair of dark eyes blinking through celluloid spectacles, a clipped, gray mustache and an enormous, good-humored mouth. In this face appeared none of the villainy that the Governor had suggested, nor did it promise the efficiency that Marx had foretold: and yet, after that fantastic interview with Cardozo, now happily immersed in his fourth glassful of whisky, it seemed at least friendly and unpretentious.

"You'd better come with me into my cabin," said Glanvil, and the figure, with an abrupt and unacknowledged bob to the Governor, followed him. Glanvil closed the door behind them, pointing to a seat which the other refused.

"Now, sir," he said, "you are Mr. Almeida?"

The apparition bowed. He produced a sheaf of cards from his pocket, selected one with a flourish and presented it to Glanvil. It was printed in four languages: German, Italian, Portuguese and English. He stood back smiling as Glanvil stared in amazement at the last.

BOMBA

The General sympathetic Undertaker builder for the living and the dead Contractor etc.

Refuge and refreshing bungalow, 52 Avenida da Republica, Panda.

Ready-made coffin supplied with Hearse and Uniformed men at any moment Corpse washed and dressed Ready made Hammock always in stock for sale.

Trucks, Venetian blinds, etc., all repairs made and payment after satisfaction.

And I'll bury your dead by easy system only be honest to your Sympathetic last friend.

BOMBA'S ADVICE—Do not live like a fool and die like a big fool. Eat and drink pay all your honest debts—that's gentlemen.

Always be praying for a happy death then a decent coffin by Bomba.

Will Bury the dead Book of Tobias I'll feed the living, that's Bomba.

Contracts taken for Carpentry, Masonry, Painting, Tombstones etc. at moderate charges.

BIMBO BOMBA—alias Fernando Souza

While Glanvil read this astonishing production its owner's lips moved silently as if shaping the words of which it was composed. Looking up from the print, Glanvil caught them pursed in the rapture of their final explosion: Bimbo Bomba. For the moment he was too entertained to be angry.

"So you are not Almeida," he said.

The creature shook his head with a gentle melancholy.

"Then who the devil are you?"

"YOU have not read the card? No? I am Bomba, captain: your best friend. Captain: best friend you got in this goddam port. Almeida!" His lips fell, his nostrils wrinkled with disgust as though the very name stank in them. "You and me make business, captain, big business. What you want, I got it." He smacked his hands in triumph: "I got it!" he screamed. "Everybody know Bomba. You ask the Governor!"

Evidently the Governor was in it. Glanvil remembered the salutation that had passed between him and his visitor and the same anxiety to discredit Almeida. As for this fellow, he was evidently some shady kind of Goanese comprador whose business was with the chief steward. It seemed as if the whole port had concentrated on a conspiracy to waste his time and fret his threadbare temper. A sudden gust of irritation took him: with difficulty he controlled his voice.

"Get out of this," he said. "Get out, double quick, and don't let me see you aboard this ship again!"

Bomba raised his hands and his moist eyes in protest." "Your best friend, captain: sympathetic last friend. When you have been here a week you understand. Fifty-two, Avenida da Republica. Fifty-two. You remember? Same number as a pack of cards."

Glanvil threw open the door; he laid his hand on Bomba's shoulder; in its pressure there was a hint of hidden propulsive force before which he found it wise to yield. Tactfully he melted away into the alleyway, and Glanvil, hot in his determination to run Almeida to earth, would have followed him if he had not suddenly found himself face to face with Mrs. Salvia, who stood mutely before him and would not allow him to pass.

"You want me?" he said irritably. "I'm sorry: it's impossible. I can't speak with you now."

"You are going ashore?" she asked, unruffled by his haste.

"At once. When I come back I can put myself at your service. If you want to go ashore yourself, you had better ask the chief officer. He will help you."

She shook her head. In her hand she held a packet of old letters to which she seemed to be looking for inspiration; but words would not come; only her sad eyes begged him to be patient.

"Before you go—if you could spare me one moment—" she said at last.

Damn the woman! But if the tragic modulations of her voice were not affected he had no right, no power to refuse her. In any case she need not look for a repetition of their last passionate interview. He had put all that resolutely behind him: he was safe, and therefore could afford to be generous.

"Come in," he said shortly. "Sit down. What is it?"

She gave a sigh of relief and sat down on the locker. Glanvil stood with his back to her, nervously rearranging the papers that Cardozo had rejected. He heard behind him the sound of a choking sob that made him shiver with an emotion that was half pain, and half anger that he should have felt it. After a moment of uncertainty she regained her equilibrium and spoke in a voice that was a triumph of rigidity.

"CAPTAIN GLANVIL, I told you the other night that I had a great deal at stake in coming to Panda. I don't know whether Mr. Marx let you know that my husband was employed by your agents here, Almeida's. It's seven years since I've seen him. That's a long time: in seven years people can change. And now that I've got here—thanks to you; please don't imagine that I forget that—I feel ridiculously—there's no other word for it—frightened. I feel as if I can't face it without knowing, without being a little more certain—"

Her voice faltered so pitifully that he felt he must help her out. He knew that his harshness was an affectation, and compelled himself to be natural.

"But Mr. Marx gave me to understand," he said, "that your husband had written repeatedly, asking you to join him here. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, yes," she answered eagerly. "Here are all his letters. They're written in Italian, so I'm afraid you couldn't understand them."

"Well, well, then," he encouraged her; it was just as if he were trying to coax a child out of some unreasonable fear. "I really don't see why you should be frightened, or what you want to be more certain of."

"That he really wants me." Her voice broke on the words.

"But, my dear Mrs. Salvia," he smiled, "surely if you were as uncertain as all that you'd never have come. Of course you're a little nervous; but honestly—"

"No, no," she broke in, "you don't understand. There was no choice. I *had* to come. In fairness to Gina and myself I couldn't go on living like that. I had to settle it one way or another."

The blank misery of her soul and, even more, the appeal of her physical presence which had regained all its power in this new intimacy, moved him deeply. It was inconceivable that Salvia should not want her; and this interview, after all, was the last.

"Tell me what you wish me to do," he said. "Anything that's in my power shall be done."

"I knew you would say that," she told him, in the same low voice. It was more, he reflected, suddenly, than he had known himself. "I want you to see Almeida—I can trust you to be tactful—just to find out, if you possibly can, how the land lies. Then I shall know the worst or the best. If, in the meantime, you can allow Gina and me to stay aboard here—"

"Of course you can stay here," he replied hurriedly.

"Thank—you."

The simplicity of the word intoxicated him; and yet his cautious mind reached far ahead of it. "But if," he said slowly, "it should be the worst?"

"Oh, God, don't say it!" she whispered.

Her terror shamed him. Shocked at a cruelty of which he could not believe himself capable, he recoiled into an equally incredible, dumb tenderness. Her whisper brought him back, helpless, to the point at which they had parted two nights before when she had melted away from his arms. His brain was red with hatred for the unknown Salvia, and with desire. By an effort that scorched his will he mastered the flames of both.

"Forgive me," he said. "I will see Almeida. I'll do everything that I can."

"Yes," she murmured.

He picked up his papers and left her.

IT WAS possible that the absent Almeida issued his orders telepathically; nothing less could explain the violent activity which now showed itself on the *Vega's* decks. Already the hatch covers were off, the derricks lifted, the winches rattling and spinning.

About the foot of the gangway a dozen dug-outs and dinghies clustered. In one of them sprawled three rowers whose blue jerseys made an attempt at uniform. On the back of one of these jerseys, in frayed red wool, Glanvil deciphered the letters ALMEIDA, and jumped at Almeida. Knowing not one word of Swahili, he stepped aboard. The boatmen fell to their oars and pulled him over the blinding water toward the shore. Here, in obedience to repetitions of the word Almeida the chief of the boatmen handed him over to a loafer who lay gnawing the stringy stone of a green mango as big as a coconut, and in the company of this guide Glanvil passed through the ficus avenue in search of the agent's office.

At that hour and on such a day the least shade was grateful. Beneath the moist dome of his topee, Glanvil's scalp pricked and smarted. The mangoes of the Avenida received him. Never was so heavy a green so shadeless; his feet burned upon a coral roadway whose whiteness searched his eyes. He hoped the fellow knew where he was taking him, and doubted it. But he reached, at last, a building that seemed newer than all the others he had seen. It was of galvanized iron and had the appearance of some chapel of ease in an industrial suburb perverted to secular uses. Half of it appeared to be a store, the other half a drinking shop; on the narrow veranda, six inches above the roadway, were set a dozen flimsy bamboo tables, each with a carafe of water. Evidently there was some mistake. He turned on his guide, repeating the word Almeida, receiving nothing but a smile in return.

Perplexed and irritated, he mounted the veranda and had barely perceived the number 52 nailed above the doorway when he saw advancing toward him the unwelcome figure of Bomba. Bomba had taken off his topee, revealing a close-cropped iron-gray head. He stood blinking upward with narrowed eyes, the same good-humored smile on his thick lips. His reappearance snapped the last heat-frayed threads of Glanvil's control.

"Are you responsible for this monkeying?" he cried. "This is the second time I've asked for Mr. Almeida and found you. You'd better explain."

"Eh! Everybody knows Almeida," said the little man with a friendly grin. "You come inside for a cool drink, no? Everything you want I got, that's gentleman! Everybody knows Almeida."

"Then if everybody knows him, please send some one with me to show me his house."

"*Cer*-tainly, *cer*-tainly," Bomba purred. "Then we do business later. Yes?"

He clapped his hands and a tall white-robed Swahili appeared to whom he babbled a string of incomprehensible words. "*Cer*-tainly, *cer*-tainly!" he sang. "When you have seen Mr. Almeida you come back again?"

But Glanvil did not wait to answer him. Back he tramped along the brilliant white-hot roadway, past the kiosk to the seaward end of the Avenida, where Bomba's boy left him outside a ponderous doorway carved in arabesque and decorated with polished brass nails. No name; no number; only in its middle a heavy wrought-iron knocker with which he hammered impatiently.

A SERVANT, who might have been the brother of Bomba's, opened to him. This time he kept the name of Almeida to himself. Some one, at any rate, was expected, for the man immediately led him through a long passage that smelled like a cellar into a square patio. Over the pavement of this sunken courtyard, an irregular mosaic of broken Persian tiles, the native passed silently. Glanvil followed with echoing footsteps. Over his head a thick trellis of foliage defied the sun. Here, in obedience to a signal, he waited.

Presently the Swahili, returning, led him to a square room with a high ceiling, on the farther side of the courtyard. His eyes had been prepared for darkness by the green antechamber; but this room was so dark that he could have believed it empty until a white shape in front of him revealed itself as a four-poster bed, shrouded in mosquito-netting like a catafalque. From the interior of this gauzy cage a voice bade him good morning.

"You are the captain of the *Vega?*" it said. "Please take a seat. I am Almeida."

An Almeida that was only voice seemed better than no Almeida, but more astonishing to Glanvil than the purity of the English in which this greeting reached him was the melodious quality of the voice itself: in its soft and honeyed richness it seemed to have affinity with the atmosphere of the patio.

"Yes. I brought the *Vega* in this morning," he replied. "My name is Glanvil."

"Glanvil," the voice repeated, investing the word with an unfamiliar beauty. "Glanvil. Ah!"

By this time Glanvil's eyes had succeeded in discerning through the haze of mosquito curtain the shape of Almeida's body. He was very tall—certainly more than six feet; for his toes tented the sheet at the extreme end of the bed where Glanvil was sitting—and the reach of his arms, which lay outside the coverlet, would have made a boxer envious. His shoulders were propped upon a mass of pillows hardly whiter than his face. The man lay there motionless, like a tall statue fallen: only his voice was warm and living.

"As you may guess," he said, "I am a sick man; but that does not prevent my attending to business. I hear that you came in at dawn. I hope you were well received?"

"When I left the ship," Glanvil told him, "they had started discharging the cargo."

"Good. You had no trouble with officials?"

"Scarcely trouble." Glanvil told him of Cardozo's antics, of Bomba's intrusion and of the way in which he had been misdirected ashore. Almeida listened keenly, punctuating the story with an occasional mellifluous "Yes."

"You have complied with all the port regulations?" he said at last.

"The Governor, or whatever he calls himself, refused to look at my papers. He was most polite."

"Exactly. Within the next three hours you must see that everything is in order. This is important. If you don't see to it Cardozo's politeness may land you in difficulties. A wire from Mozambique and you may find yourself arrested. That will give me trouble. You may have gathered from Cardozo's attitude that he is hostile to me?"

"I did. He began talking about you, but I had no time to listen to him."

"A pity. It would have been instructive. Ears are more useful than eyes. Cardozo is no friend of mine. It will amuse you to know, Captain Glanvil, that I have no friends. It amuses *me*. Not too much, though. My strength is limited; I know exactly how much amusement I can stand without danger. Let us waste no more energy. You have nothing to do with our feuds; all that I want from you is that you should clear the cargo that Mr. Marx has sent. After that, I think, your charter ends. Your owners will leave the matter of cargo homeward to your discretion?"

"That's the arrangement," Glanvil told him.

"Then we shall see. As a precaution, be scrupulously observant of legal formalities. In lawless places law has a way of being inconvenient. Otherwise you need fear nothing."

"I don't," said Glanvil. He had no patience with this air of melodrama. Almeida with all his mysteries seemed as unreal and harmless as Bomba or Cardozo. He refused to take them seriously.

HIS duty was plain enough: simply to discharge his cargo, to pick up another and to go. No, it was not quite so simple as that. He had forgotten Mrs. Salvia and a promise that must be fulfilled. At this point he found himself listening once more to Almeida's voice.

"Unless you deliberately court it," he was saying, "you need have no further trouble with Cardozo or his party. Your landing this morning was an experiment. In future I shall see that you are protected. In any difficulty you will deal with me direct. I do not delegate authority. All your papers will be dealt with here. I don't think there is any more to be said, so now I'll wish you good morning."

Mechanically Glanvil rose.

"Before I go," he said, "I want to ask you about a man named Salvia. I believe he is in your employment."

"No, he is no longer employed by me," Almeida answered smoothly. "What do you want to know about him?"

"Your correspondent, Mr. Marx, approached me in Naples on behalf of his wife. He told a distressing story that induced me to bring her along as a passenger. I don't know any details, but it seems that she is rather afraid of meeting her husband. I hoped you would be able to give me some information or advice."

"I can give you no information. Salvia was sent to me from my house in Mogadishu. He was unsatisfactory, so I discharged him. As for advice: I can only urge you to take her back again."

Glanvil laughed. "You're not very helpful, Mr. Almeida," he said.

"I have no intention of helping you."

"In that case I had better go to your friend Cardozo?"

"As far as I am concerned, Captain Glanvil, you can go to hell."

The sweet persuasiveness of the tone in which Almeida uttered the words only aggravated their insolence and the anger that swept through Glanvil's mind. Before this he had regarded Almeida merely with distaste; now he felt that the man's mind was as devilish as his prone body was obscene. In any ordinary circumstances he could have dealt with such a gratuitous insult in his own fashion; but neither this man nor his surroundings were ordinary. One might as well use physical or verbal violence against the phantom of a nightmare. He steadied himself.

"In that case there is nothing to be said," he replied.

Almeida made no answer, and without another word Glanvil left him, hurrying through the scented patio and the dim corridor into the street, hearing, as he stood on the threshold outside, the sound of a grating lock shot home.

Full of frustration and hate, he turned his steps again in the direction of Bomba's store. Walking along, forgetful of his surroundings, he compelled himself to find a reason for Almeida's outburst even if he could not fathom the cause of its continued effect on himself. But he could not, and, still baffled by the mystery of Almeida's vindictiveness he approached Bomba's Refuge and Refreshing Bungalow.

During the hour that Glanvil had spent in his visit to Almeida the place had awakened. The veranda was packed with drinkers, whose speech and gesticulations proclaimed them Latins, or, as Hendry would have called them, dagoes. No doubt they were workers on the unfinished railway for whom the *Vega's* cargo of "luxuries" was intended. Their faces, even as Glanvil saw them, excited with alcohol, showed the drawn pallor of malarial saturation.

Inside the Refuge, where Bomba himself stood peering and smiling, a mechanical piano tinkled the refrain of a song that had once been comic, stumbling over the notes like a drunken man. When he caught sight of Glanvil Bomba hurried forward. Ruthlessly dislodging one of his customers, he offered a chair.

"SIT down, captain, sit down, gentleman. You found Mr. Almeida. Yes?"

That "yes" was pregnant with a curiosity which Glanvil grimly left unsatisfied. Refusing the drink that was offered him, he came quickly to the point, asking for information about Salvia.

"Ah, Salvia, the poor Salvia!" Bomba replied with a melancholy headshake. "There you see what a man Almeida is! Salvia is not the first, captain, not the first, gentleman. Yes. That Salvia came down from —Massowah, was it? Good business he done there for Almeida. A handsome young man, that Salvia." He screwed up his eyes. "You know Almeida not like women? Ha-ha! Handsome, captain. Italian. Almeida always like the Italians."

Glanvil interrupted him with a question by which he had been troubled all morning. What was Almeida himself?

"Almeida is not like the rest of us,

captain. Oh, no! Mr. Almeida is not a man. Some kind of devil, the niggers think. The priests say it was God that struck him down. They cross themselves when they pass his house."

"I mean his nationality."

"The devil is all nations. I am good Christian, captain. No? Almeida speaks all language like a damned Jew. They say his mother was English like you and me."

"And Salvia? What happened?"

"Salvia has the taste for women. Well, captain, we are all men. And that was enough for Almeida. *Bas*—finish! All up with Salvia. I am an honest man, I feed the living and bury by easy system, Book of Tobias, that's Bomba. I'm general sympathetic undertaker and last friend, captain, but how can I give drink on credit to man when his money is finished! Pay your honest debts. That's business."

"You mean that Salvia has no money? How does he live?"

Bomba raised his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"How can I tell? Who can do business with a man who has to do with Almeida? He live somewhere out there by the swamp." He pointed vaguely. "In a *banda* that he has built. Nobody go there except the niggers."

"Can you show me the way?" Glanvil asked.

"Show the way, captain? Certainly. *Cer*-tainly! You want to see Mr. Salvia?" His eyes blinked craftily. "Perhaps you bring the poor man money to pay his honest debts. No? I will send the boy with you at once." He clapped his hands.

But by this time Glanvil had had enough of Panda. Dizzy with heat, maddened by the piano which had kept on tinkling as though it were in the grip of a delirium, he desired only to escape to the comparative quiet and sanity of his ship. As he rose Bomba held his arm, whispering in his grotesque dialect something about business, good business, copra. He didn't listen. Murmuring, "Not today—tomorrow, perhaps," he freed himself and plunged once more into the fiery heat of the roadway.

ABOARD the *Vega* Glanvil's nerves grew calmer. Presently he found Mrs. Salvia and took her to his cabin. He tried to be gentle.

"I have seen Almeida, your husband's late employer," he said. "They have separated—I can't tell you why. Your husband left his service some time ago. Almeida would tell me nothing: it seemed a sore point with him: but another man, a Goanese shopkeeper to whom, it seems, your husband owes money, tells me that he is penniless and living in a hut that he has built for himself somewhere outside the town on the edge of the swamp."

"Alone?"

The suddenness of the question took him aback.

"I didn't ask that," he replied.

Her lips quivered in the ghost of a smile as if his innocence amused her. His mind caught backward at Bomba's words, "Salvia has the taste for women," but he quickly dropped them, for they repaid his clumsiness by searing him like a hot iron. He had been a fool not to see that this was the thing that mattered most to her. Distrusting her courage for the first time, he sought refuge in words:

"The first point, as it comes to me, is this. It's evident that your husband's quarrel with Almeida has ruined him financially. He has debts and no money to pay them; he has no employment. He isn't, in fact, in a position to support Gina and yourself. Besides that"—now his whole mind was concentrated on an attempt to save her—"I think you must be prepared to find him changed. I mean that it stands to reason that a man who has suddenly found himself ruined may go downhill.

"Almeida is curiously unpopular. The fact that your husband has been associated with him is bound to act against him; and when a fellow becomes desperate . . . you understand? To put it shortly, conduct no longer seems a matter of great importance. He's bound to relax; he can't help it. And that means—" He hesitated.

"Drink?" she asked quietly.

"No, no, I can't put it as definitely as that," he said. Her blue eyes pierced him; their flame dried up the springs of his speech; he could dissimulate no longer, and she knew it. There was a long silence.

"I think I am wasting your time, Captain Glanvil," she said at last. "You have been very kind—too kind—and I am grateful; but I can't afford to be indefinite. You've prepared me; and now I want to face everything that has to be faced. First I must try and see him. If you can possibly arrange for me to be put ashore?"

"No, no," he answered quickly, "you can't do that alone. That would be taking too big a risk."

She looked at him for a moment thoughtfully as if she were trying to weigh in the echo of his words the gravity of the fear that prompted them. In that look there was apprehensiveness, but no vestige of fear.

"Of course you are right," she admitted. "I am so much in your debt already." She paused. His heart was brimming with anxiety to serve her, but before the offer reached his lips she had continued: "If you can possibly spare him, I think Mr. Harvey would go with me."

If she had planned her pause as a device of coquetry it could not have tripped him more neatly. Humiliated, suddenly distrustful, he asked himself if she were not playing with him and whether the game were worth the candle. His offer went cold on his lips; but when he found her eyes again he saw that they were humble and quite guileless, so that he took courage.

"If you particularly wish Mr. Harvey to go with you," he said, "I'll certainly release him. I had planned to go with you myself."

"Oh, in that case," she murmured, flushing faintly, "of course . . ."

He wished he could divine the meaning of her change of color; he knew how hollow must be a triumph enforced by his superior position; he wanted to make her state her preference, being content to abide by it; but as he gazed at her and sought smoother words in which to put his question his pity accused him of selfishness.

"I will go with you whenever you are ready," he said.

"In five minutes," she told him. "Gina is asleep. I'm afraid I must wake her."

"I shall be waiting for you at the gangway."

"Thank you."

HALF an hour later the rowers ran their boat aground. The tide was out, and so a strip of wet sand separated them from the beach. Submissively she allowed him to carry her ashore in his arms. He could not have believed that she weighed so little.

Opposite Bomba's Refreshing Refuge he stopped and asked her to wait for him. Inside it the piano still tinkled; the men whom he had seen there in the morning had not moved; most of them were drunk, and Glanvil felt glad that he had not invited her to enter. Bomba himself prolonged a siesta in some inner chamber from which he emerged with a strip of brown stomach showing through the gap in his pajamas. Without his spectacles he blinked more pitifully than ever as if he were too sleepy to realize what Glanvil wanted.

"Yes, captain, yes, gentleman," he mumbled. "Certainly. *Cer*-tainly!" He trotted out to the veranda with bare and simian feet, calling in Swahili to the native who had misled Glanvil in the morning and now sat investigating a jigger by the side of the paralyzed dog.

"Look here," said Glanvil distrustfully, "this is the chap who put me wrong this morning. Are you sure he won't lead me astray again?"

"No, captain, no, gentleman," Bomba cynically confessed. "That's a good boy; he always obey orders."

They set off again in silence. Suddenly, as if confidence had failed both together, the pink houses and the avenue of mangoes ended. They crossed a strip of waste land on which goats, chickens, and thin-legged children were routing amid mounds of refuse. The rank smell of the goats struck them suddenly.

"The edge of the swamp," Bomba had told him, and soon he guessed that their search must be nearly ended, for they came suddenly on a series of parallel sluits, clogged with papyrus, from which a melancholy heron rose into the whiteness. The path twisted cunningly, like a snake that returns along its own track, guiding them between the fans of water-palms and under arches of wild vines, until, at last, they emerged into a circular clearing with a round grass-hut in its center. Their guide waved his hand and smiled, then squatted to resume his toilet.

"I suppose this is the place," said Glanvil. "Perhaps I had better make a reconnaissance."

"Will you?" she whispered.

He went forward into the open. It was a

patch from which the bush had been cleared by fire. Here and there the trunk of a more obstinate tree remained thrust above the soil, blackened and torn, like the mutilated survivor of a battlefield. Between them the black soil had been lightly tilled and planted with irregular lines of mealies that had just put out their tassels of bronzed silk, and through this plantation a track, smoothed by bare feet, led straight to the opening in the *banda* that stood for house-door.

Glanvil advanced, through a sinister silence suddenly broken by the sound of gentle crooning which came from a pair of green doves in a wicker cage attached to the wall of the *banda*. Then, from behind the house, he heard another sound: the regular impact of a pestle on a wooden mortar, pounding grain for porridge or sugar-cane for fermented drink.

More eagerly he turned the corner and saw that the pestle, a long pole hardened by fire, was wielded by a native woman, a girl of sixteen or seventeen, whose polished shoulders gleamed like satin as she raised it and let it fall with a grunting expulsion of breath. One arm was clasped by a circlet of shining metal; over the opposite shoulder and breast she had draped a square of pale blue cotton with a bold pattern of red-centered O's. On the ground at her feet, paying no heed to the impacts of the pestle, a naked baby embraced the neck of a gigantic gourd.

HE HAD not stared at her a moment before the woman became conscious of his presence. She dropped her pole and gathered the cotton square about her, facing him, breathless, and almost pretty, in her alarm. Her fright assured him that she was alone, and so, having no language in which he could make himself understood, he called to Mrs. Salvia.

"There's no one here," he said, "except a native woman and a child."

She joined him, pale and very composed. Suddenly she touched his arm.

"The baby," she said in a whisper. "Do you notice anything?"

Ever since he had first set eyes on it he had been puzzled. Now, in an instant, he realized why. The creature's tangled hair was of a silky texture, its eyes, though dark, were not veined with brown like those of the mother; above its bronze pot-belly and narrow chest he saw a face that was in fact a caricature, reduced and devilishly ingenious, of Gina's as he had seen it during the last week burnt black by the glare of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. He felt it his duty to soften this discovery.

"Yes," he said, "I see a likeness, but that's nothing to go by."

She shook her head. "Oh, yes, it is! The child is like Gina, but even more like him—when he's asleep. The woman looks frightened. I'm sorry we've frightened her. It's not her fault. She's very young, isn't she?"

Her words breathed a sort of dreamy tenderness that Glanvil found it impossible to understand. The situation between these two women demanded some reaction more violent. Her quiet seemed unnatural, ill-omened; he could not guess how long it would last.

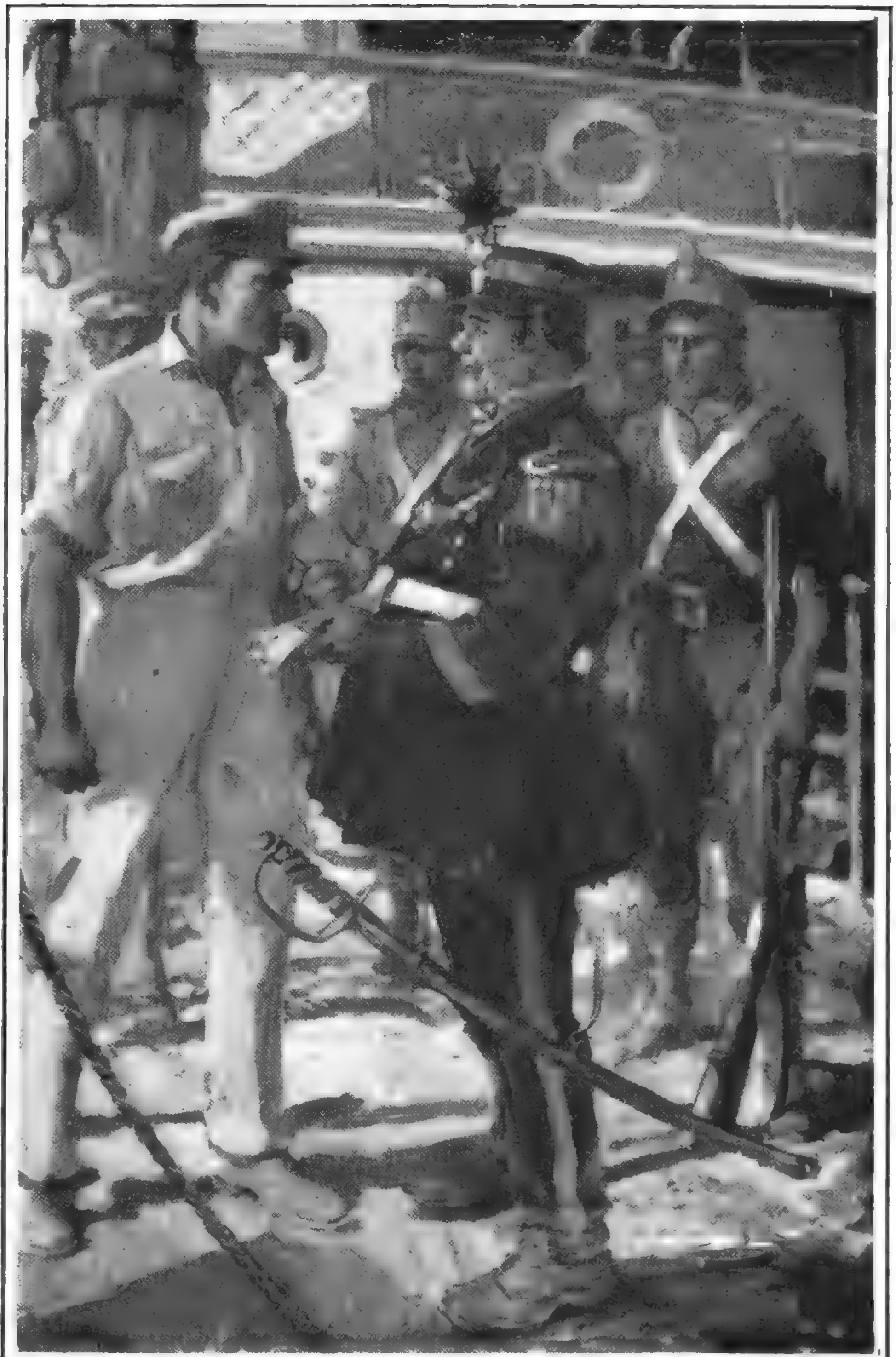
"Come along," he said gently, laying his hand on her arm. "After sunset it will be difficult to find our way back. Your husband isn't here, and there's nothing to be gained by staying."

"Just one moment," she answered softly, freeing herself from his hand. With the same air of gentleness she advanced.

The woman shrank from her with a wild movement of distrust, then recovered herself and stood smiling timidly. Mrs. Salvia put out her hand toward the baby, who grasped its forefinger in a copper fist. Glanvil was conscious of the shudder that went through her at the contact.

Then she began talking rapidly in a low voice and in a tongue that he could not understand. The eyes of the black girl lighted; evidently she understood. She nodded her head quickly in answer to several questions. Her lips opened, murmuring uncouth words among which Glanvil caught the sound of Salvia. And all the time that Mrs. Salvia darted her swift questions the baby gripped her white forefinger and scrutinized her with its beady eyes.

GLANVIL had never felt more helpless or pitiful in his life. He knew that he was watching the disintegration of half a life, word after word falling like a sledge-hammer on Mrs. Salvia's bruised mind. He could do nothing but marvel at the strength that steadied her level voice and wonder how long it could sustain her.



Glanvil came on deck to find Cardozo strutting in his uniform. In the background slouched four soldiers.

At last she disengaged her finger from the baby's fist and turned to him.

"That is all," she said gently. "She has told me everything. We had better go."

They went. He dared not ask her any question; but by her bemused silence he knew that the supreme moment of her drama had passed without a cry or a tear. Behind them, as they left the clearing, the thudding of the wooden pestle began again, rhythmical, insensitive. They threaded the margin of the swamp without a word. As they left it, Mrs. Salvia began to speak, distantly, as though she were talking to herself rather than to him.

"They have been there two years," she said. "The baby is eighteen months old. It was just eighteen months ago that he sent me his last letter, when he told me to come out. Of course he never thought I'd be able to. Now I can read between the lines. How miserable he must have been!

"I told her that I was his wife. She didn't seem to understand. I suppose one wife is the same as another to her. Of course he is drinking. She says that he is drunk every night. That stuff she was pounding was sugar cane. He has taught her Italian—a sort of Italian—just enough for her to understand him and answer. The baby is a girl. Like Gina."

Suddenly she darted a question at Glanvil.

"Can you understand it?" she asked. "I know nothing about men, only him. If you were in his position. Tell me, honestly."

Her question relieved him. The endless disjointed monologue had become intolerable. But he could not answer it.

"Men are made differently," he said, "and of course he's Italian."

"Yes, yes, I know. That makes no difference. I think he's just like anybody else. Could you have done it? You must know." Fortunately she did not wait for his answer. "When I was alone in Naples," she went on quickly, "it would have been perfectly easy for me—I mean it would have been perfectly easy for me, if I hadn't been myself, to—"

She shrank from the completion of the sentence, yet looked to him for a reply. It was not for him to defend Salvia, but he felt that she desired passionately to hear some word in his defense, even if it were only a shred, round which to crystallize her own humiliation and disgust. He tried to help her out.

"We know nothing of the circumstances," he began. "If a man was down on his luck—hopelessly—"

She gave a hard laugh in which he heard the first suggestion of scorn.

"You asked me to be honest," he said.

"Yes, I'm sorry. I don't know what we're doing or where we're going. I think my brain has gone."

He was silent. Like atoms in the black heart of a thundercloud they had been carried on their way, heeding nothing. Night had fallen. The bazaar was behind them. They had reached the end of the avenue where, at a distance, Bomba's veranda detached itself from the night like a lighted stage. The tinkle of the clockwork piano tinkled and failed in gusts, wafted or broken by invisible currents of air. No voices could be heard: the figures on the veranda spoke with gestures that were like the movements of marionettes.

AS THEY came abreast of the Refuge a shout of laughter went up. It was directed at a lanky figure in khaki shorts and a torn shirt; a wild-eyed creature with the unkempt hair and flying beard of a desert fanatic, who clung to one of the veranda stanchions and shouted black blasphemies in three languages at Bomba's customers as they baited him. Bomba himself stood blinking at this gratuitous addition to his sources of entertainment. In the roadway a half-moon of native boys had gathered to watch the fun, and from time to time the drunken man dashed out at them like a cornered bull and sent them flying into the darkness.

In one of these dashes Glanvil's ears caught a burst of foul English. Automatically he placed himself between the scene and Mrs. Salvia and quickened his steps. He had a shameful suspicion that the man was English. A woman might hear offensive things. He laid his hand on her arm with an instinctive movement of courtesy and protection.

In that moment the drunken man caught sight of them hurrying through the shadow and staggered out to meet them. At least he had wits enough to see that Glanvil was a stranger.

"You off the English ship?" he shouted. "That's very good. Here, you stop a minute. I can speak English. I've been in England, I have. Here, Mister, stop! You come along with me and I'll show you a fine—" He left the sentence unfinished, for, as Glanvil quickened his pace and passed him, he caught sight of Mrs. Salvia. "Christ! He's got the goods with him," he confided to the attentive gallery in a whisper that was quickly drowned in torrents of laughter.

Glanvil felt the arm of Mrs. Salvia contract in a spasm of terror. Her fingers suddenly clutched his, communicating such an urgency of appeal as he had never known. She began to run, dragging him on into the darkness as though some horror followed and they could only escape it by speed.

"It's he," she gasped. "Laurence! What can I do? What can I do?"

As she spoke his dull brain had guessed it. Feeling himself utterly inadequate to help or console, he put his arm about her as they fled, hoping that its strength might steady her or at least convince her of his presence and the needlessness of this headlong flight. At last he found feeble words and tried to comfort her, breathlessly telling her that he was sure Salvia had not seen her face.

"I know, I know," she answered, and then, with a sudden violent impatience: "But what difference does that make?"

It was true. Now she had begun to cry, quietly, inconsolably. His body was shaken with her sobs, that broke on him like a surf. He could do nothing but hold her closer and take their impact. He knew that she could no more listen to reason than an exhausted child. Her sobs were hard, voiceless shudders that spent themselves slowly. When a sound escaped her it was high-pitched and pitiful like a baby's wailing, and it broke his heart. Pain of the body he had seen, and death, but never this inarticulate extreme of spiritual suffering that made a human creature dumb as a wounded animal. The reflux of her agony rose and choked him because he too was dumb and could not express it.

They passed the tomblike house of Almeida. They reached the shore. Even in the presence of the boatmen whom he kicked awake, she could not control herself. She sat quietly sobbing in his arms as they pulled across the starlit water toward the ship.

APPALLING as her situation seemed to him to be, Glanvil could not escape a feeling of subtle and shameful satisfaction that mingled with his concern. It maddened him during the early part of the night; it drove him at last to reassure himself concerning her. He went to her door to listen; he found it open. A curtain hung limply before it. He could hear nothing. It was so quiet that a fear seized him lest she should have anticipated him. He pulled back the curtain.

She was lying asleep with Gina huddled to her breast, finding comfort, like a lonely animal, in contact with another of her species, clasping the child with one protective arm outstretched like the curved paw of a cat. Behind the thankfulness that for the moment filled his mind he became aware, once more, of Gina's cruel resemblance to the baby in Salvia's hut, and then, overpoweringly, of the sweetness of Helen Salvia's lips.

He had never been able to see her face before; and now that her blue flames no longer abashed him, he stood satisfying his greedy eyes with its beauty, its childishness, its harrowing pathos. The ardor of his gaze, or else some instinct of maternal watchfulness must have warned her; for suddenly her eyes opened. They were soft and placid; for though she looked at him she was not yet awake. They had the calm of another world in which neither Glanvil nor Salvia existed.

He would have gone, but now it was too late. He spoke in a whisper.

"I'm afraid I've wakened you. I'm awfully sorry, I only wanted to see that you were all right."

"All right?" she echoed.

He was only thankful that his intrusion had not offended her modesty. Gina gave a little groan in her sleep. Helen Salvias' hand made a protective movement that was a caress.

"But now that you are awake," he went on, "I want you to know that you are safe on board here. From any violence, I mean. I don't think we shall be here more than a week. Then you can come back to Europe with us; probably to Liverpool. You needn't worry your head about ways and means."

"Liverpool?" she murmured. "I don't understand."

"To Liverpool," he repeated. "From there you can easily get in touch with your English friends."

"I'm sorry," she said. "I think I must be dreaming. I don't see what you mean even now. I have no friends in England. Not one. Besides—"

"You can trust me," he said, with a tremor in his voice.

"Besides," she went on, "Laurence—I mean my husband—is in Panda. We shall go ashore tomorrow."

SO MUCH for the high flights of sentiment and chivalry into which he had ventured. With a single sentence she sent him crashing. She was unanswerable; and yet he felt that she should have been answered. Far into the small hours, he lay vexed with his perversity.

It was not a case to which conventional morality was applicable. The moral standards of settled communities living under the protection of laws had no validity in Panda. One might as reasonably live by the laws of the bush in London. To accept such standards in Panda was disarmament; to practice them, suicide. Of course she didn't understand this. In any case suffering and anxiety had made her irresponsible. He had a right to dictate to her for her own sake and for Gina's.

He had no right. And, what was more, again his conscience questioned the purity of his motives. Horror of Salvia's degradation, pity for her, offended goodness, a sense of human obligation; all these might be counted for virtue. But the complex of his emotion knew other elements. Jealousy! Was he not more eager to deny her to Salvia because he desired her himself?

But blacker than these self-accusations, and more desolating, was the suspicion that perhaps she was not merely driven by a distorted sense of duty but drawn by the obstinate attraction of Salvia himself. It was unnatural, incredible, but possible. If that were so there was nothing more for him to think or say.

When he awoke, late, he sent for Hendry, to whom, the night before, he had told briefly the truth about Salvia.

"Mrs. Salvia seems determined to join her husband in spite of everything," he said. "Of course we can't stop her. No good meddling between man and wife."

"Stop her?" said Hendry with round eyes. "Mrs. Salvia went ashore in Almeida's boat first thing this morning—she and the child. She told me you'd authorized her to ask me. I hope I've not made any mistake."

"No, no. You did quite rightly." Glanvil recovered himself quickly. "I'm sorry I disturbed you. Everything going well?"

"First rate, sir. Only twenty or thirty tons left in Number Two. Mr. Almeida's stuff is coming alongside already. Copra and ground-nuts."

"What? I haven't accepted it! It's like Almeida's damned impudence!"

"Three dhows are alongside already, sir. I took it that everything was arranged. The papers are in order and the tally-clerks are aboard. Nothing unbusinesslike about it. I can't complain of that."

Glanvil swung himself over the side of the bunk. This irritation on the top of the other had shaken him back into himself.

"Understand, Mr. Hendry, you don't take one bag aboard until I authorize you. The fellow's trying to rush me, and I'll see him damned first."

"Very good, sir. As long as I know." He paused in the doorway. "Then that Cardozo's been aboard ever since five o'clock. He's waiting in the saloon. I gave him some breakfast in your absence, though I guess that eating's not much in his line."

"Quite right," said Glanvil, already stripped to the waist. "Tell him as you go out that I'll see him in about a quarter of an hour. By the way, what time is it?"

"Just on four bells, sir."

"Good Lord! Very good, Hendry."

He threw on a kimono and hurried along to his bath.

CARDOZO was full of talk of cargo for the *Vega*. He and his partner would have it. Bomba, of course. There might be some delay— At the word Glanvil stiffened. There could be none. Cardozo only smiled. These English! He dropped hints. He was the governor; the law. Glanvil would do well to be reasonable. But in the end Glanvil ordered him ashore; gave Hendry orders, too, that he should not come aboard again.

"You say Almeida's stuff is alongside?" he asked Hendry.

"Three dhows, sir. For'ard there, on the starboard side. The tally-clerks say there's more coming this afternoon."

"Give me the papers."

Hendry produced a sodden document. Glanvil glanced through it. No fault to find with Almeida's office-work, anyway. Five hundred tons of copra and ground nuts; so many bales of sisal fiber and parcels of rubber; one hundred bags of cloves. In the memory of Cardozo's infamy and before this evidence of straight-dealing he felt a sudden revulsion in Almeida's favor. Apart from the sinister vindictiveness of his conduct toward Salvia, who doubtless deserved it, there was little fault to find with him. Only one thing struck him as queer. Almeida's careful documents were dated for the twenty-first of December, the day after they left Naples.

"I'll take these along with me, Mr. Hendry, and have a look at them," he said.

He threw off his coat and settled at his desk. It was incredibly hot. Under such a climate it was only natural that the people who lived in Panda for years on end and generation after generation should deteriorate. Probably Cardozo was a fair specimen: rougery and corruption springing like weeds in a soil of stupendous fertility. If it were hot, even here, with the light excluded and the fan going, how much hotter it must be ashore!

He looked at his watch. She had been ashore nearly five hours. In five hours she would have had time to reach Salvia's hut. How could she have attempted such a journey alone? It was only another facet of her stony perversity. Perversity, he called it, and yet, perhaps, it was only another name for an exaggerated sense of duty. Call it duty by all means: anything rather than love. If she had only had the sense to ask for some one to go with her—even Harvey! She could have had her Harvey if she wanted him. But obviously she didn't. Madness!

He compelled himself to scrutinize Almeida's draft bills of lading. *Copra: five hundred tons.* The figures blurred before him. Five hundred tons. Five hours. He heard himself speaking as from a distance.

"I shall accept Almeida's offer," he was saying.

With these irrelevant words the owner of that distant voice assumed possession of his empty body as normal consciousness masters that of a dreamer who wakes.

STRAIGHTWAY he wrote a letter of acceptance to Almeida, on the understanding, he made it clear, that all cargo marked in the lists was ready, and that delivery should be completed within a week. As for freightage: he was ready to accept, on behalf of his owners, a small percentage in excess of the rates current at Mozambique and—in the case of cloves—at Zanzibar.

He signed and closed his letter with a feeling of satisfaction, if only because it put a definite term to their stay in Panda. Then he sent along a message to Hendry telling him to make his own plans for the stowage of Almeida's cargo and to get to work on it at once. Cardozo, from the shore, must see Almeida's dhows unloading. The lesson was to be administered in a visible form that he could understand. And in seven days—why, then perhaps, if all went well and space remained, Cardozo's own cargo could be dealt with.

Late in the afternoon Glanvil went ashore. Again he visited Almeida's house.

The shadowy native beckoned him as before. He entered Almeida's room. Out of the midst of the muslin Almeida's voice came with a measured, painful slowness:

"Sit down, please."

"Some of your cargo is already being dealt with, Mr. Almeida," he said. "The dhows you sent alongside this morning."

"Good."

"I must confess I didn't like the tone of your note, sir. I don't accept your instructions or any one else's about the disposal of my space. As a matter of fact I had proposals of cargo that would have filled it from another quarter which—which I rejected. I decided, at any rate, to give you preference. Here are the terms on which I wrote a formal acceptance. I shall be glad if you'll confirm.

"The proposal I've made to you," Glanvil went on, "is a percentage that we can discuss later—frankly, I'm acting on the opinion of you that Mr. Marx expressed in Naples—above the current rates cabled from Mozambique and Zanzibar.

You'll be able to get those more easily than I can."

"I will try," said Almeida.

RELUCTANTLY he went from Almeida's to Bomba's. He told himself that he was only going there to get a drink that would put him on his legs again: in reality he sought it because the hateful Bomba was his only link with Salvia and Salvia's wife, a link of dubious strength in any case, and more particularly since his morning's quarrel with Bomba's partner Cardozo. After that he could not even be certain how he would be received.

He need not have troubled himself. Sympathetic was not the word for Bomba. He bowed Glanvil through the rows of drinkers on his veranda to an inner room and poured him, with his own fat hand, a glass of methylated whisky.

It amazed Glanvil to find Bomba so affable after the way in which his partner had been used that morning. There must be some motive of self-interest behind this glowing welcome.

And, as he soon discovered, there was: Mrs. Salvia. Of course her landing had been the talk of Panda; the subject burned on Bomba's tongue. He watched Glanvil narrowly to catch the moment for a propitious opening, never guessing that Glanvil was doing exactly the same thing. It was Bomba who took the plunge:

"You never come back las' night, captain. That boy show you the way all right? But why you never told me who the lady was that wanted to see the poor Salvia? Why you never told me that the first day, captain? I'm your best sympathetic friend, gentleman, yes, Bomba, and we do business later. Only why you never told me that was Salvia's wife?"

"Who told you that the lady was Salvia's wife?"

"Who told me, captain?" Bomba's body quivered with a suppressed amusement. "One who ought to know. Ha, ha! Salvia himself. The poor Salvia had found clients yesterday. These men that come down from the railway, he gets hold of them. Salvia knows all the languages. He can put them up to what they want and they give him a dollar here and there. That means all up with the poor Salvia. Full to the neck!"

He chuckled dismally. "But Salvia keep his head for business even when he's tight. He sees you in the road. Another client! Then he comes over and sees the lady, too. That took poor Salvia's breath away. 'Bomba,' he says, 'you're my last friend. I've seen a ghost out of hell!' he says. 'Who's that, then, Salvia?' I ask him. 'It's my wife, Bomba,' he says. 'My God, it's my wife!' So I took him in, gentleman, and gave him another. Gave him another—free of charge. 'Please Heaven,' I say, 'she's brought enough to bury you decent, Salvia. That's the one that came along with the captain this morning and asked for you.'

"'But it's an English ship,' he says. 'It's impossible. Where did it come from?' 'Naples,' I told him. 'Then it's true,' he says, 'it's true,' and begins to cry like a baby. It was too much for him after the fever and all he'd suffered from that cursed Almeida. No holding him. The man was mad, captain, mad, gentleman. That poor Salvia will do murder some day."

Glanvil had had enough of it; there was a dark madness brooding under Bomba's ghoulish words; the macabre obscenity of this creature whose gross brown body fattened on drink and death and insanity made him feel murderous, too. The thing that had once seemed fantastic suddenly became a ghastly reality. In the fury of that moment he beheld the brown twinkling eyes of Bomba with hatred; he could have crushed him with as little compunction as he would have shown toward a swollen puff-adder blinking at him from under a stone.

Bomba, unconscious of the feelings that he aroused, laid his hand on Glanvil's arm.

"Tell me, captain," he purred, "has the lady brought money for Salvia's honest debts?"

Blindly, he staggered out, escaping from Bomba's clutching hand. A single motive was in him, to find Salvia's hut, to know what had befallen her.

FOR more than half an hour he groped his way onward. By this time the clouds hung so dense and low that their direction could no longer be seen; the air that he breathed was part of them. Suddenly he became aware of a quietness, as though the pulse of night had stopped. It brought him up short with a feeling of imminent disaster. And he was not alone: the whole bush shared in this strangled intermission; the cicalas ceased their din with one accord; the frogs were silent. It was as though some influence borne on the wings of darkness clutched at the heart of all living things. His own heart fluttered with distress. Something was coming.

It came, came with a flash of fire whose passage could be felt like the flick of a whip and left his eyes scored with a fantastic pattern of flaming trees that burned on the retina after the flash had passed. For a moment Granvil feared that he had been blinded. Then all thought was overwhelmed by such a buffet of sound as might have sent the globe crashing out of its orbit into space. And then again. Blow upon blow the hammers fell. The drums of his ears were driven inward.

Blinded and deafened, he swayed until the wind caught him and swept his legs away, flinging him breathless on the ground, where he lay motionless as a frightened animal, dazed by the tumult of broken trees whose leaves and branches, stripped away by the hurricane's suction, streamed over him as on a flood.

Glanvil was thinking not of his own danger nor even of Mrs. Salvia's. In the first fury of wind that had tossed him aside every thought of which he was capable had fled aboard the *Vega*. How was she placed for shelter? Could her anchors hold? Could Cheadle get up steam in time to save her? Hendry and Cochran were good seamen, ready for emergencies; but in such an emergency as this seamanship counted for nothing. He himself would have been helpless. He saw her plucked from her moorings, blown seaward like a straw, piled up on the coral ledges of Vumba with a broken back. His ship, and he should have been aboard her.

The wind passed. It had gone as swiftly as it came. The extended horror could not have lasted thirty seconds. In flicker after flicker of lightning the track of the devil revealed itself: like a scythed alley in a cornfield; like the bed of a torrent, along whose edges livid trees that had escaped destruction stood shuddering.

For a moment Glanvil could do nothing but blink at this scene of destruction in a dazed wonder at his own survival. Then, with a triumphant return of reason, he saw in the straightness of the storm's track, an excuse for hope. The thing was a tornado, flung from the sky like a spinning peg top, monstrously destructive, but within narrow limits. On the margin of its track withered euphorbias that a man could have overturned stood unscathed. It was a matter of hit or miss, and in that vast anchorage of Panda the odds were ten thousand to one on the escape of a single ship. A passionate confidence returned to him. The thing no longer seemed terrible.

He rose to his feet again. The sky cracked above him like an iron dome, and this time, simultaneously, the burst clouds discharged their deluge, drenching him in a moment from head to foot, dimming the flicker of lightning that never ceased drumming in anger on the parched bush. In a moment the heat of his body was cooled, and, what was more, his mind, that had been curdled with heat, experienced an instant relief, as though the water were sluicing through his brain, washing it clean of the mephitic vapors with which it had been cumbered. He stretched wide his arms, upturned his face to let the stinging water cleanse him. Out of its violent catharsis he was born again. He could have laughed aloud for joy as he pressed the water from his eyes.

He pushed onward. On the left of the tornado's reaping his path now shone in the lightning like a trail of silver. Good, and better; for by this he knew that its fury must have spared Salvia's hut. The torrent never ceased; the track was now a rivulet deeper than the height of his ankles. The lightning grew less frequent; he went on through a watery darkness. Drenched and grotesque as he was, he felt that he was ready for anything. With head lowered and hands held before him, he plodded forward through thick mire. It seemed as though the tunnel of palms would never end. And then his outstretched hands encountered a strange resistance which was not that of a tree but of a sodden human body. He heard a sharp cry of alarm. He trembled.

"It's you," he whispered. "Thank God!"

FROM the moment in which he touched her wet dress he had known that it was she. She did not answer him. There was no need for speech. Only silence or music could do justice to such a meeting; and music there was in the surge of drumming rain, in the brazen peals of thunder that broke above them. His hands had found and caught her shoulders just in the same way as he had held them once before; but now he was strong and confident and darkness veiled the defenses of her eyes.

The wet muslin of her blouse clung to her shoulders, defining their naked slenderness; the thrill of such an intimate contact made him madly happy. He felt that he must speak; but he was choked with words, and his broken voice could only tell her how soaked she was.

"I must see that you don't take cold," he said.

She answered nothing. But for the warmth that burned into his damp palms she might not have been alive. Her pitiful muteness overwhelmed him. Never had he known a tenderness so devastating. In the darkness her cold wet cheek touched his. He could have cried aloud for joy with the exultation of a swimmer who breasts a breaking wave.

The violence of his emotion had in it the sudden freedom from physical restraints that overtakes men in the face of a cataclysm. Drunk with his own potency and with the tumultuous darkness, he gathered her in his arms. Her body relaxed, the wave engulfed them both; but as his fingers, eager for fuller knowledge, hungrily defined the soft contour of her arm they encountered an unexpected resistance, Gina, like a small drowned kitten, huddled to her mother's side and dumb with terror. In his exaltation he had forgotten the child's existence. The discovery brought him to his senses.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "She was so quiet I didn't know she was there. Poor little kid, I'd better carry her for you."

He picked up the small soaked bundle in his arms. She did not even whimper. Beneath the drumming of the rain he felt her rapid heartbeats like the flutter of a nestling, and with that the mad moment passed.

"We shall be drowned if we stay here," he said almost roughly. "Will you follow me? Keep quite close. I think I know the way."

"Yes," she answered.

"Thank God I found you!"

"I knew you would come," she answered.

They were trudging through water halfway to their knees. The rain quickened in bursts of violence like some infernal tattoo. Gina, her icy terror thawed by the comfort of Glanvil's body, began to wail softly. He held her closer.

"There now, don't cry, my pet," he said, and then, as if the momentous question meant nothing: "How did you know?"

"I can't tell you how. I knew."

His heart was flooded with gratitude for those words. He wanted to ask her what had happened; but there was horror enough in the night without his adding that of reminiscence.

"You were coming back to me—to the ship?"

"Yes."

He dared not ask more.

The way, that had seemed endless in daylight, contracted.

"You," he said, suddenly, "you—will stay now? I knew it was impossible—"

"Did you?" The words were spoken mechanically and had no meaning to her; she was quick to repair the injustice. "Yes, you were right," she said. "Impossible. He is changed, too dreadfully changed."

SHE stopped and when she spoke again she might just as well have been addressing a stranger.

"Captain Glanvil, I can't, I can't possibly talk of what happened on shore. You'll understand that. I know you will. But I can't accept your—hospitality, your great kindness, without making my position clear. I *must* be honest with you. I've no further claim on you—of course I never had any: I'm talking stupidly—I mean that I've already burdened you with my false pretenses."

"Don't speak like that," he entreated, "there's nothing—nothing—"

She would not let him continue.

"No, no," she said, "there's a great deal. Please listen to me. I'm so much in your debt already, and I want you to understand that I'm quite penniless. The little money I had—it was your generosity that left it to me—is gone. We're entirely destitute. No possessions but the clothes that we're wearing. You must understand that. But I can't possibly live another hour in Panda.

Not another hour. The passage that you offered me—I've no right to ask you to shelter me further; but if you can be merciful—"

"Please don't say any more," he implored her. "We'll go aboard at once."

Merciful. He was convinced that there was a double meaning in the word, that her delicacy prevented her from demanding not only the shelter which she must know that he could not refuse but also immunity from a passion that was distasteful to her but which might easily be taken as a condition for that protection. This entreaty, although unspoken, was as evident as if she had put it into words. It fell upon his mind with a sudden chill. It was so definite, so undeserved, so humiliating a contradiction of their dark and passionate meeting. Unless he had misunderstood the meaning of that stormy embrace? Unless the embrace itself had been nothing but a hallucination of rain and wind?

INCREDIBLY, he compelled a crew to row them to the *Vega*. In the doorway of Hendry's empty cabin Cheadle was standing, a hunched, high-shouldered figure, staring out at the rain. The appearance of Glanvil and his companion in their clinging clothes did not seem to astonish him. He was off duty. The spiritual and physical tornadoes that had whirled through Glanvil's life, that dark gulf, and Panda beyond it, did not exist for him. On board the *Vega*, in watery isolation, the sluggish rhythm of his life had remained unchanged; but the sight of his gloomy abstraction gave Glanvil the sensation of a man who returns to some homely village after adventurous wanderings and finds the friends that he knew spinning out their lives in endless monotony, aging, alien, and a little unreal.

"So you're not blown away, chief," he called. "There's been a tornado ashore."

Cheadle stared back with a sort of grudging incredulity.

"Is that so, sir? We've had a nice drop of rain here. It ought to clear the air. . . . I see you've caught it, sir," he said. "Can I be of any assistance?"

"Thanks. Mrs. Salvia has come aboard with me. I don't know if they've cleaned out her cabin. You might be good enough to ask the chief steward to see that everything's in order and that she's made comfortable."

"Very good, sir. Certainly." There was a hint of disapproval in his voice. "I see she's caught it, too. In the meantime she might take a seat in the mate's cabin here. He's taking a hand of cards aft."

"I'll go straight to the cabin if I may," Mrs. Salvia whispered. "Thank you so much," she added with the intonation of a woman who has been helped over a stile. "I'll carry Gina myself." Without another word she left them.

Cheadle watched her bedraggled figure as she retreated. He turned to Glanvil with a combination of wink and headshake infinitely expressive.

"It was as you anticipated, sir?" he inquired.

"I don't know, Mr. Cheadle. Evidently it was pretty bad. We must do what we can for her."

"It's a serious matter, sir. Whom God hath joined. You never know what may come of it," he muttered as he slouched away.

You never knew. Once in his own cabin Glanvil stripped himself of his sodden clothes, rubbed back a little life into his numb body and slipped into bed. It was half-past ten, less than six hours since he had left the ship. Once more he was staggered by the irrelevance of measured time to such swift living. And you never knew. No sooner had he switched off the light than sleep, like a black deluge, obliterated the quivering restlessness of his mind.

He was out early on the rain-scoured deck, talking to Hendry, whose eyes grew round at the tale of the tornado on shore.

"I'm glad it didn't come our way with you ashore, sir," he said. "I believe that one's liable to get that sort of mess-up on this coast. I hear that Mrs. Salvia's aboard again," he added diffidently.

"Yes, it was just as I told you. We shall have to take her home."

Hendry shook his rough head.

"I confess it beats me altogether. But you never know, sir," he said.

"And that reminds me," went on Glanvil. "There's another name for the black-list, as well as Cardozo's. The man Salvia is not to be allowed on board."

"You bet he'll try it, sir," said Hendry.

But the morning passed serenely in the ordinary round of life aboard ship. Mrs. Salvia did not appear on deck, and Glanvil made no attempt to see her.

THE day passed. Salvia came in the evening; Harvey drove him back to his boat, frothing with curses and threats. The work of shipping Almeida's cargo went on. And only a half pathetic, half offensive letter from Salvia came, on the second day, to break the routine of labor and of heat: a demand for his wife.

"Only two days more for Almeida's stuff, sir," said Hendry, rubbing his plump hands as he entered the saloon for lunch. "I don't know if these rains will prevent Cardozo getting his down to the coast. We haven't had the pleasure of seeing that gentleman again."

"No. And I don't think we will," said Glanvil sardonically.

Some devil of false prophecy must have inspired him. At four o'clock, midway through the first dog-watch, Hendry sent down an urgent call for help. Glanvil came on deck to find Cardozo strutting in his uniform, smiling, and actually shaved. In the background slouched four soldiers from the fort, sweating and sheepish in their hot uniforms. They carried carbines. Cardozo saluted him formally.

"You are Captain Glanvil," he began.

"You know I'm Captain Glanvil. Why do you ask?"

"Formality," Cardozo replied, brandishing a dirty sheaf of papers. His little eyes burned with a fierce and a conscious satisfaction. "Before I give you this document it is my duty to establish identity. I am the Police, and this is the process of Lorenzo Salvia against you for the enticement of his wife, Elena Salvia, aboard this ship."

He presented the document to Glanvil at arm's length. Glanvil disregarded it.

"You can take it back to him," he said. "Mrs. Salvia is a passenger, booked for Europe. She has paid her passage. Beyond that I have no responsibility."

"In that case I am at liberty to remove her?" asked Cardozo with an excessive politeness.

"You're at liberty to remove yourself," Glanvil growled.

"In fact you refuse to give her up?"

"Absolutely." By this time he was becoming angry. "What is more, I refuse to allow you on board here wasting my time with this theatrical nonsense. What's your authority?"

Cardozo bridled.

"Authority? Can you not see the uniform of the Portuguese Republic? Is not that enough?"

"No, it isn't. I refuse to be impressed by fancy dress."

Cardozo blinked, then smiled indulgently. "What if I hold instructions from Mozambique?"

"Show them to me."

Cardozo threw wide his hands, his sword clanked on the deck. "No. I admit that I have no such instructions. To say that I had would not be strictly accurate. Telegraphic communication with Mozambique has been unfortunately interrupted by the storm. Therefore I am forced to act on my own responsibility. In a matter of such seriousness it is justified. Evidently you do not understand how serious. You do not know our civil code. In this process Salvia cites you for two million *reis*, that is to say, two thousand dollars."

"Very well, you can give me your document and go."

Cardozo shook his head reproachfully.

"Am I so stupid, Captain Glanvil? You take me for a fool? What is to prevent you evading the law and sailing away from Panda? Let us be reasonable. I give you the document, certainly: that is my duty. You will see by the stamps that it is official. Then I put an armed guard on your engines. That can hardly inconvenience you."

"We'll see about that," said Glanvil. "I must get into touch with my consul at Mozambique immediately."

"Unfortunate. As I have told you the wires are down. These storms do great damage all down the coast. They are a great handicap to trade."

FOR a moment Glanvil stood with his eyes fixed on the deck. It was difficult to guess how far the fellow was bluffing. He heard Cardozo murmuring the word "sympathy." Its spuriousness determined him. He took out his watch.

"I propose giving you three minutes to get off this ship."

Cardozo shook his head with a studious

air of magnanimity. He pointed to the soldiers behind him.

"These rifles are loaded," he said. "What you propose is impossible." Glanvil turned away. "Impossible," Cardozo murmured, "unless—"

"Unless what?" Glanvil asked abruptly.

Cardozo looked from Glanvil to Hendry significantly.

"If I could converse with you a moment in private," he said, "I might be able to explain."

"Very well. Come along."

Cardozo followed him to the cabin with his sword trailing behind him. Once in its shelter he removed his gold-laced hat, revealing a narrow bald forehead on which beads of sweat had gathered like dew. He flung himself into Glanvil's chair with a sigh.

"This is more reasonable," he said. "It is better to be friendly."

"There is no question of friendliness. Kindly tell me in as few words as possible what you mean."

"How much better it would have been, Captain Glanvil," said Cardozo reflectively, "if you had accepted my offer; if you had trusted me rather than Almeida."

Glanvil halted in his stride, cutting him short.

"If that's all you have to say you'd better go."

"Ah, you Englishmen!" Cardozo sighed. "What concentration! This is what I want to say. In this colony processes are long; they pass from one court to the next, and there are always—what do you say?—appellations. I wish to say that the process of Salvia may keep you here for six weeks, eight weeks, ten weeks, three months—" He waved his finger in spirals that widened.

"Nonsense!" said Glanvil. "In a few days the matter will be in the hands of my consul. What's more, you may find yourself in hot water. Don't forget that!"

"Hot water?" Cardozo professed an ignorance that his appearance corroborated. "Six weeks. Now to stay here six weeks would mean considerable loss to your owners. They would thank you for it? I think not. You are a young man, captain. You have a career to think of. No?"

Glanvil made no answer.

"It displeases me to think," Cardozo went on dreamily, "that you should destroy this career for the sake of a woman. Therefore, I am prepared to help you." He paused. "Not interested? But listen! Salvia is a good friend to me. Naturally, for Almeida used him like a dog. Over Salvia, Fernando Souza and myself can exert an influence, a considerable influence; pressure if necessary. For reasons of friendship—well, call it business, then—we are ready to use that influence. Fortunately it is a civil, not a penal process. We can induce Salvia to withdraw it on the condition—"

"No, no. I've had enough of this. I'm not to be blackmailed."

"Listen, listen," Cardozo protested. "A simple condition. The condition that your sailing is retarded. Not by six weeks—nothing so extravagant—three weeks at the outside, perhaps less—in short until our copra that is on the road—actually on the road—has been embarked. As I said before, we will protect you. Admit that this is generous."

"Generosity be damned! This is just barratry enforced by blackmail. As for your process, or whatever you call it, it's a put-up job. I shall take no notice of it till I hear from Mozambique. Not another word! I've finished with you."

Cardozo put on his hat.

"You are very obstinate, Captain Glanvil."

"You'd better clear before I lose my temper."

"Clear? Ah, I understand. Certainly. I leave behind a corporal and three soldiers. If you compel them to use violence it will be your own fault."

Glanvil was silent, and Cardozo, seeing that nothing was to be gained by waiting, left him.

IN THE midst of his reflections Glanvil became aware of an unusual silence aboard. The winches had stopped working. He looked at his watch. It was not five o'clock. Surely Cardozo had not dared to interfere with the loading of cargo?

He hurried out on deck. Hendry, red and flustered, was coming to meet him. On the well-deck below them the stevedores were chattering in excited groups.

"What's the matter now, Mr. Hendry? he called.

"I can't tell you, sir. It's beyond me. The blighters stopped work—all of a sudden. I can't get any sense out of them."

"Where's the foreman?"

"The swine's slipped off. Can't find him anywhere."

"But that's ridiculous. Is there nobody who can explain?"

A languid Zanzibari in a dirty loin-cloth was dragged forward. His hair was silky, his effeminate features held a trace of Arab fineness.

"This one speaks a few words of English," said Hendry.

Glanvil questioned him. The man smiled softly and waved his hands. He could explain nothing: he only knew what the foreman had told him. There were no more orders from Almeida.

"Do you mean that Almeida ordered him to stop working?"

No: it was not that. Almeida's orders had ceased.

A curious way of putting it, but precise. However he placed his questions, Glanvil could get no other answer. When he suggested that the order to stop might have come from Cardozo the native shook his head emphatically. Cardozo had nothing to do with it. Almeida's orders had ceased. The figure suggested the switching off of a current, a failure of motive power. It was bewildering. They sent him away.

"It beats me altogether, sir," said Hendry. "Everything was going first rate before this hitch. They don't seem to understand it themselves. Upon my soul I don't know what to make of it. I suppose there's nothing to be done."

"Nothing to be done, Mr. Hendry? Of course I must do something. I must go and tackle Almeida at once. Bring his boat round to the gangway."

The climax of this mad interplay of faith and faithlessness, love and hate, honesty and corruption, comes in the next instalment of "The Sea Horses"—in December EVERYBODY'S, out November 15.

The Ship Model

By Theda Kenyon

JUST like the great ship's, the master delighted to make
My sheets and belaying pins, and lightly poised wheel,
Sails swung out for a wind that I never shall feel,
Gossamer ropes coiled aft, and a delicate keel
Keen for the touch of the sea . . .
And . . . an anchor, for travesty,
Mocking the end of a journey I never can take!

Figurehead eager to leap through the green-and-white foam,
Decks clean-scoured, and bright compass, a-tremble to roam,
Bow sharp pointed to gather the "bone in her teeth,"
Masts that quiver with eagerness, mad to be gone—
I am part of the sky, and the yellowing lure of the West!

What though I could not endure the mad kiss of the spray?
Other ships have gone down . . . and in that there would be no disgrace—
But oh! To stay still, in a sheltered and soft-scented place
Displayed on a shelf like a flower in a pottery vase—
Rather be caught by the gale, and each snowy sail torn
Rags on a splintered mast, than that I had been born
Perfect . . . and impotent . . . with this urge in my breast!

A Novelette

A Rich Man's Son

Discipline Is Hard but Inevitable. From an Idle Life Spent Mostly in a Speedster to Grocery Store Is a Long Jump, but It Was Worth It

By Frances R. Sterrett

Illustration by O. J. Gatter

THE judge looked at young Arnold Welles. His face was very serious. He did not say a word for quite two minutes.

"I don't think you deliberately ran over this man—Hubert Grant," he said at last, and his voice was very slow and very cold. "But you did deliberately exceed the speed limit. You have been before this court three times on the same charge—reckless driving. You seem to be one of the young men who are a menace to people, the idle, reckless, extravagant son of a rich man. You thought you were protected by your father's money and influence; but even a rich man's son cannot break the laws. If it seems wise for me to do so, I can send you to the workhouse for ninety days."

Crowell, Arnie's lawyer, hastened to say that Mr. Wells expected to pay damages. Crowell himself had been to see the family of Hubert Grant and had offered to pay all the expenses of hospital and doctor, and a large sum in addition. There would be no question as to payment.

The judge frowned. "I feel this young man must pay—not his father. I am told that Hubert Grant has a broken leg and a broken arm. That means that for three months he will be unable to work to support his family. The family cannot be allowed to suffer for what was not its fault."

Crowell would have told him that the family would be well cared for, but the judge refused to listen to him. The judge looked at Arnie, who stood before him uneasily, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. Arnie Welles was a good-looking young fellow, and he knew it. He regarded the judge in a manner which made the judge wonder whether he was frank or impudent. He seemed to regret that he had injured Hubert Grant, and he did not try to evade his responsibility for the accident. His previous experiences in the traffic court had proved to him that it was useless to dispute the tale told by the policeman's speedometer. So he listened as patiently as he could. Of course the judge could send him to the workhouse, but he wouldn't—not A. J. Welles' son.

"It was through you that the Grant family was deprived of its support," went on the judge in his unsympathetic voice. "And it must be through you, not your father, that such support is restored. So I sentence you to take the place of this man you have injured and support his family until he is able to return to his work. And I mean by that that you, yourself, by your own labor, shall furnish this support. You are not to obtain the money from your father. Officer Brady will go with you to the Grant home and ascertain what sum Mr. Grant earned. You will report your arrangements to earn the same to this court and every week you will report, also, whether you are earning it. And you are not to drive a car during this period. You understand? Very well!" He turned away.

"Your Honor—" began Crowell, eager to tell him that old A. J. Welles would furnish far better support to any family than young A. J. Welles; but the judge had already taken up the next case. "Never mind, Arnie," he said consolingly. "You go along with Brady now, but don't you worry. Your father will fix it."

But A. J. Welles did not fix it. He scowled when he was told of the sentence, and he heard Crowell explain the steps which should be taken for an appeal; but he shook his head.

"No," he said shortly. "The boy knew he was breaking the law. I've paid fines until I'm tired. Let him see what it means to rob a family of its bread-winner. The sentence is just."

When Arnie, rather dazed at the rapidity with which his case had been rushed through, left the courthouse with Brady he unconsciously looked around for his long low blue racing car. Brady laughed.

"No more autos for you, my lad," he said. "It's the street car for us."

Arnie flushed. He had half a mind to make a dash for liberty, but a street car stopped in front of them and Brady motioned him to enter it; and such is the power of the blue uniform that Arnie obeyed. He wondered why as they rode on and on. What a fool he had been to accept the sentence so meekly! But it had surprised him. He had almost expected to be sent to the workhouse—Crowell was ready to fight that. He should have fought this, urged Crowell to fight it, although something told him that fight would be useless. The judge had it in for him.

At Thirty-first Street Brady pulled his sleeve. "Here we are," he said, with a laugh.

He eyed Arnie curiously as they crossed the street. Arnie was well known to the force. As the judge had said, he had been arrested three times and many times had just escaped arrest. He was one of a group of young men whose fathers gave them more money than was good for them. Brady grinned. He wondered how Arnie would support a family when he had never earned a cent in his life. Arnie had come home from college a month before with a carelessly won diploma packed somewhere in his trunk. He had talked vaguely of sometime going to work, but "sometime" was a vague term.

On the corner was a little grocery store, and just beyond was a frame house. Brady turned into the walk.

"Here we are," he said, and he grinned again. The situation was highly humorous to Brady.

Arnie stopped short. He did not want to see this family. But Brady put the hand of authority on his arm.

AN ELDERLY woman with a colorless, worried face answered the bell and took them into the living-room. As Brady explained their presence Arnie looked around him. Lord, what a place! How did people live in such a cluttered little room? Still—they did. The place had a look of home. The few cheap rugs were worn and scuffed; the chairs and the old sofa sagged wearily; there was dust on the floor, and the flowers in the vases were faded and dried; but there were books and magazines on the table and pictures on the wall and toys on the floor. Mrs. Wallace looked at them and then at the two men as if she would apologize for the disorder, explain that there was a limit to what one pair of hands could do; and then she shrugged her shoulders. What was the use?

"This is young Mr. Welles, the man who ran over your brother."

Brady introduced Arnie, who colored angrily and tried to look defiant and only succeeded in looking miserable. It wasn't fair of Brady to talk as if he had deliberately run over Hubert Grant. It was an accident. That was what it was—an accident.

"The judge has sent him here to talk to you." Brady explained why the judge had sent him while Arnie blushed and wished that the floor would open and drop him out of sight. Never had he been more uncomfortable.

Mrs. Wallace listened without comment. She seemed a gray sort of woman, the type which loses its ability if the daily routine is broken. She answered Brady's questions readily enough. There were five of them living in the little house; herself, her nephew Hubert Grant, his two children—a boy of seven and a girl of five—and Hubert's sister Katie. The children were in school. Katie was in school, too. She taught the kindergarten over at the Washington. Yes, Hubert owned the grocery on the corner. He had bought it five years ago when they moved from Mifflin after Hubert's wife died. He couldn't stay in Mifflin without Elsie. He did pretty well, managed to take care of his family. He wasn't as ambitious as he used to be. Elsie's death had seemed to take away his ambition, and now he seemed satisfied just to get along.

How much did it cost to support the family? Well, they rented the house. The rent was forty-five dollars a month—without heat, of course; so there was coal in the winter. And gas! And electric lights! And food! Wasn't it awful how high everything was in the city? Why, in Mifflin eggs and milk didn't cost half as much! Of course they got them at cost through the store, but still it was awful how much just bread and butter cost. Katie paid her own way and was saving money. Katie had expected to carrry the family until Bert got around again. They had been figuring, but it wasn't right to put such a burden on a young girl when she wasn't to blame. The Welleses ought to pay. And damages to Bert, too! Yes, she thought a hundred and fifty dollars a month would cover their necessary expenses. She did the housework and looked after the children. They lived economically. Every one said she was a good manager.

One hundred and fifty dollars was nothing to Arnie Welles: he spent that much without a thought. But now as he realized that he would have to earn it, and earn it every month for at least three months, it sounded enormous. He looked up with startled eyes.

"I don't know what Katie will say," Mrs. Wallace rambled on. "Katie's got a mind of her own. And she's proud. I don't know will she like to have some one outside the family earning the money. She said there should be big damages, but this is different. Here she is now!" she exclaimed in relief. "She comes home at noon. Her school's just around the corner."

The door slammed. Arnie jumped to his feet as Katie came in. A dull red swept into his face. He could not look at Katie, when Mrs. Wallace told her who he was, but Katie looked at him. Her flashing eyes seemed to scorch him.

"I should think you would be ashamed of yourself!" Her voice was hot and scorching, too. "I should think you would hate yourself to know that you have half killed an innocent man! Perhaps you have killed him! How dare you drive your car over people? Just because you are a rich man's son you think you can do anything! You ought to be in jail until Bert is able to be out again! You shouldn't be allowed to go free!"

Brady hastened to explain that Arnie was not to be allowed to go free. Katie listened to him and laughed scornfully.

"I suppose you expect me to say we won't have your help!" she said when she could stop laughing. "You think I should say that we spurn your money—that we would starve rather than be fed by your guilty hands. But we're not going to do it. Are we, Aunt Rache? We're going to take all we can get! It won't be as much as we should have. Do you realize even now what you did? You ran over my brother, broke his leg and his arm, injured him for life maybe; you took their father from his helpless little children; you—"

"I didn't mean to," stammered Arnie, more embarrassed than he had ever been in his life.

"Didn't mean to! As if that was any excuse! No, sir. You can tell the judge, officer, that we think his sentence is all right, and that we'll expect Mr. Arnold Welles to take my brother's place and provide for us until my brother is able to do it. And that doesn't mean that there won't be a good big suit for damages, too." She tossed her head.

THERE was so much scorn in her face and in her voice that Arnie stiffened. He raised his head and looked at her. She was a slim little thing in a faded blue gingham frock, but she seemed more like a flame than a girl. She was hatless, and her red hair gleamed. Her gray eyes were full of fire, her face was flushed. She looked at Arnie triumphantly. She made him furious.

"You think I can't do it!" He was so angry that he stuttered. "I'll show you! And I'll show the judge, too! I'll earn a hundred and fifty dollars a month for you myself! I shan't take a penny from my father! I'll do it myself or—or bust!" he finished lamely.

She laughed again. "You'll bust, I guess. You couldn't earn a hundred and fifty cents!"

"Katie!" exclaimed her aunt.

Katie whirled around. "Well, he couldn't. And he hadn't any business to run over Bert! And he hasn't any business to come out here and act as if—as if he owned the world!" She ended with a gulp and threw herself against her aunt and burst into tears. "I hate him!" she sobbed.

If Arnie had been uncomfortable before, he was a thousand times more uncomfortable now. He wished he had never driven the car which had run over Hubert Grant! He wished a lot of things as he stood there and saw Katie sob on her aunt's shoulder. But Katie's was an April nature, and if she had been quick at tears she was also quick at smiles. The fire in her big gray eyes was quenched and in its place was a contemptuous amusement which was even more disturbing.

"How are you going to earn the money? It won't be as easy for you to earn a hundred and fifty dollars as it has been to spend it," she guessed shrewdly.

He had to admit that he did not know, that he had never earned a penny in his life. She shook her head.

"It doesn't promise very well for Aunt Rache and the kiddies," she said. "It sounds as if they would starve. I take care of myself. But say!" A sudden thought came to her. "If you haven't a job, why can't you go into the store? Carl can't manage alone. Aunt Rache has been helping him, but it's too much for her. We would have to get some one to take Bert's place. I ought to let you find your own job." She looked sternly at Arnie. "But you'd never do it, not a real job; and while you were looking Aunt Rache and the kids would go hungry. What do you say, officer? Would he be any good in a grocery store?" She eyed him critically, letting her eyes travel questioningly from his sleek black hair down over his startled face, his smartly cut summer serge to his well polished brown shoes. He most certainly did not look as if he belonged in a little corner store.

Officer Brady laughed explosively. It was in his mind that young Arnie Welles would be absolutely no good anywhere on earth, but he kindly kept the thought in his mind and admitted that Arnie might possibly be of some use in a grocery.

"And as you say, Miss Grant, it won't be easy for him to get a job worth a hundred and fifty a month unless he goes to his father, and the judge has barred that. He has to get his job himself."

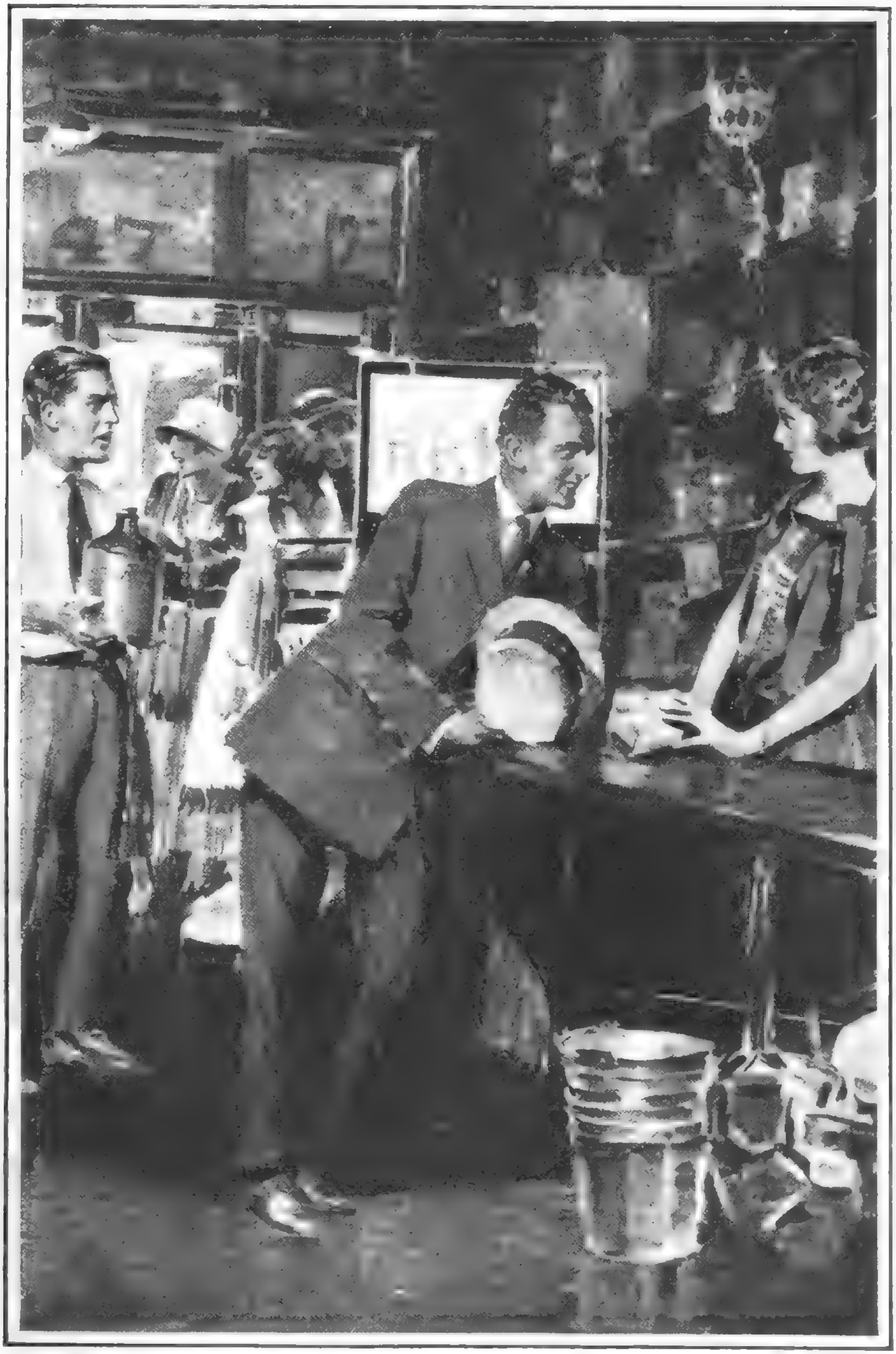
"He won't earn a hundred and fifty a month at the store," Katie said bluntly. "But he may save us that much. And he'll help keep things running until Bert gets back. I believe that was what the judge meant when he said he was to take Bert's place and do Bert's work. Of course! Come on, we'll go over to the store and look around!"

The *Gazette* carried a front-page story with big headlines of the sentence which had been given to Arnold Welles, the son of the president of the First National Bank. It said that young Arnold had started to serve it at once and was already weighing prunes and butter in the little Thirty-first Street store while Hubert Grant, its owner, was in the hospital with a broken leg and a broken arm, the victim of Arnie's passion for speed.

By nine o'clock a photographer was at the store to take Arnie's picture as he weighed the prunes and butter. The neighborhood was aware that something out of the ordinary was taking place in the store and there was an unusual number of customers. As it was Saturday, Katie was there as well as Carl Anderson, but it seemed to Arnie that he was the only one to answer the demands for codfish and onions. Although Katie and Carl had carefully explained the stock and the prices Arnie could not remember where the oatmeal was, and the salt was hopelessly lost.

He made mistake after mistake and grew bewildered. He did the best he could, and when in doubt he looked at Katie. It was as good as a lesson in salesmanship to see her take an order and then suggest a can of soup or a bargain in cereals as a finish to it. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes sparkled. She seemed to know everybody by name and answered the friendly inquiries for her brother with grateful appreciation.

ABOUT eleven o'clock there was a lull in the Saturday morning rush. And just then a big limousine drew up in front of the store, and a group of laughing, chattering young people trooped in, calling for Arnie Welles. They filled the store.



"We want the new clerk," Bob McGill explained to Katie. "We want to order a pound of prunes." Just then Arnie came in.

"We want the new clerk," Bob McGill explained to Katie. He looked at her admiringly. "We want to order a pound of prunes." He laughed.

Arnie was in the rear room. When he came in with a gallon of vinegar in his hand he was greeted with a joyous chorus.

"A quart of your best potatoes, young man, and in a hurry!" called Elinor Mahoney with a giggle.

"Give me a pound of cheese and a pack of crackers," frowned Ed Baker. "Nippy cheese, the kind that crawls!"

"I want—I want—" Alice Johnson was not sure what she wanted. A bunch of bananas in the window gave her inspiration. "I want a bunch of bananas. And I'll take them with me!"

"Oh, Arnie! I think you're wonderful!" Little Mary Deere looked at him admiringly.

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Arnie helplessly as they gathered around him.

He looked at Katie, but she would not look at him. Bob McGill was asking her if she thought her new clerk would do. Bob McGill was known to have a quick and appreciative eye for a pretty girl. Arnie frowned. He wouldn't have Bob McGill or any other man in the worthless bunch make a fool of Katie.

"BOB!" he called sharply. "Did you bring these nuts down here?"

"I did," Bob said brightly. "And I don't mind telling you that I'm coming again—alone. I'm going to buy all my butter and eggs here. I think I shall open a charge account!" He gave Katie his most caressing smile.

She looked at him coolly. Katie had a clear head, and she did not get excited easily. She also had a vast contempt for men like Bob McGill, who let their fathers pay their bills.

"This is a cash-and-carry store," she said with plenty of frost on the words.

Suddenly she laughed. They were so ridiculous, these friends of Arnie's who had invaded the store and were buying the most foolish things. Johnny Matson was making a bouquet of beets and carrots and onions and parsley which he was asking Arnie to send at once to Miss Mary Deere.

"Here's my card," he said, giving Arnie a paper bag, on which he had written an ardent message.

Their fooling was all right; at least Katie was amused by it, and Carl was amused, too—Carl could not keep his eyes from the girls in their bright sport clothes—so long as there was no one else in the store. But when customers came in, the fooling was all wrong. Katie turned away to attend to them, and she said, coldly, to Arnie:

"You'd better ask your friends to go, Mr. Welles. You have work to do."

"Aren't we work?" demanded Bob with dancing eyes. "Where are the prunes I ordered?"

"Here!" Katie thrust a package into his hands. "Thirty-three cents, please. What is it, Mrs. Slovick?" While she waited for Bob to pay for the prunes she smiled at the big fat woman with the shawl over her head.

"Say!" For the moment the ready Robert was at a loss for words. "I'll come again when you aren't so busy," he promised.

Katie tossed her head and went to get Mrs. Slovick a cabbage. Bob looked after her and decided he would indeed come again.

"Now then, little ones," he called to his friends, "we've proved the *Gazette* can tell the truth and done our shopping and we can't keep our friend from his work. We must go. I'm glad to see, my boy," he pompously told Arnie, while Elinor and Alice shrieked with laughter, "that you are beginning right, at the bottom of the ladder. Some day we'll see you at the top. Keep at it and don't get discouraged. Come on!" He led the way to the car.

Arnie had a strong impulse to go with them, and he followed them to the door. Mary Deere lingered to put her soft little hand in his.

"I think it's splendid of you, Arnie, to help these people," she whispered, as if he were there of his own free will. "Of course I know you would always do the right thing!" Her big blue eyes were full of admiration.

Arnie flushed. Not forty-eight hours before, Mary had sorrowfully told him that she would never speak to him again, that he was too selfish for words, he never thought of any one but himself. She hated him! And now she was looking at him with admiration; she was speaking to him! Blushing and laughing, she ran to the machine, where the others were calling to her.

"SEND the things at once!" Bob McGill ordered masterfully as he started his engine. "The cook is waiting for them. If they aren't there in half an hour I shall go to another store or—come back for them." He waved his hand to Katie.

"They're a bunch of nuts," laughed Arnie. But he felt strangely forlorn and deserted as they drove away. Why hadn't he gone with them? The judge couldn't keep him here if he didn't want to stay. He should say not!

"They sure are," Katie agreed dryly.

He colored indignantly. He supposed they did seem like nuts to her—Bob McGill was the limit—but she need not sneer at them. They were his friends, and Mary Deere for one was a queen. He did not know that the same desire which had seized him had caught Katie. Katie would have given everything but her proud independence to be wearing Mary Deere's smart sport clothes and driving away with Bob McGill. She hated the dingy store quite as much as Arnie did. Oh, how unfair the world was! Some people had everything and other people had nothing. It wasn't fair! She hated Arnie and his friends, especially Bob McGill, who had left his prunes on the counter.

Bob McGill came back in the afternoon. "I forgot my prunes," he told Arnie. "I say, where's the pink-cheeked pretty who was bossing you this morning?"

Arnie scowled at him. "See here, Bob, you leave her alone!" he said shortly. "She doesn't understand your kind of a nut. You leave her alone!"

"Is that so!" But Bob refused to lose his temper. "I guess I can buy my prunes where I please."

But Katie did not come back, and it was not very interesting to hang around and watch Arnie and Carl wait on the neighbor women. Poor old Arnie! Bob was glad he hadn't run over any old grocer. "I'll come back for the prunes," he said as he went away.

Luck brought Katie up the street, and he stopped and spoke to her. They stood talking for several minutes. Katie's sober face broke into laughing crinkles as she listened to Bob. Arnie frowned. When at last Katie came in he left his customer to speak to her.

"Don't have anything to do with that fellow McGill," he advised. "He isn't your kind of a chap!"

"Oh, isn't he?" retorted Katie, her cheeks scarlet. "How do you know what my kind is? And kindly remember I can look after myself. I don't need assistance from any one."

The tart reply sent the color into Arnie's face. "Oh, very well!" he snapped. "You can't say I didn't warn you!"

Arnie never knew how he lived until closing time. The day was a nightmare. A dozen times he would have thrown down the macaroni and dashed out of the door if he had not remembered that Katie had prophesied that he would do exactly that. And he had vowed that he would serve his sentence or bust. He groaned. He must have been hypnotized! He still believed that the judge couldn't enforce this sentence. He was sure his father could get him off. But he had given his word; and there was Mary Deere with her big blue eyes and her appealing little ways and her stimulating admiration. Moreover, his father hadn't been exactly sympathetic. He had looked at him with a queer appraising stare.

"Well," he had said slowly, "I'll see now whether I've raised a man or a fool with his brains in his hip pocket. You haven't shown much sense up to date, Arnie, but this is your chance. You take the medicine the judge has handed you and remember the Welleses have never been quitters. They have always paid their bills."

IT DID not seem to Arnie that any Welles had ever been confronted by such a heavy bill as had been handed to him. Three months in a dingy little grocery store! The workhouse would have been more exciting. And then he squared his shoulders. He had some pride. He would not let Katie Grant say she knew he couldn't do the right thing; he could not disappoint little Mary Deere; and he would not give his father cause to say that one Welles had failed to pay a bill. He had never been so tired in his life as he was when the last customer had been served and the door locked. It did not seem as if he could drag himself over to the cottage. But after dinner he felt better.

"What do you do in the evening?" he asked Katie curiously, when she came out to the porch where he sat smoking.

She eyed him mockingly. "There's a movie down on Hill Street and a dance hall a block up, and we can always go for a walk or a street-car ride."

He could not imagine that she took much pleasure in the movie nor the dance hall. "No, but honest!" he insisted. "What do you do?"

She hesitated. "I suppose you'll laugh." She laughed herself. "But all winter I went down to the Y. W. C. A. for French and public speaking and current events. I'm not going to be a nobody all my life! I'm going to amount to something!" And she nodded her red head.

"I bet you will!" Arnie exclaimed impulsively. "But don't you care to dance or for golf or—" He stammered as he realized that the pleasures of the Country Club, the rallying place of his friends, were barred to her.

"Sure I do! But I don't care much for dance halls. Joe Thomson is going to teach me golf on the City Links."

"Let me teach you! I really am pretty fair—"

"Joe asked me first," she told him calmly. "He's out on the road now, but when he comes back he'll teach me."

"Are you engaged to him?" He knew he had no business to ask her, but he couldn't help it.

She opened her eyes, but she answered him frankly. "Not yet. I may be some day if I decide I want to be married." Then she changed the subject. "Tell me about your friend, the one who bought the prunes."

"Bob McGill!" He shook his head. "You want to forget him."

"Why? Tell me about him," she said again.

"Tell me about Joe Thomson," he countered.

For a moment their eyes met, and she laughed again. "I'm going to bed!" She jumped up from the steps. "Tomorrow will be a busy day even if it is Sunday. There will be a lot for you to do at the store if you're going to take charge Monday, and I'll have to show you."

There was a lot to do. They worked with a will, going over the stock, looking over bills and a thousand and one things that kept them in the store until late in the afternoon. It was five o'clock before Katie brushed her hands together and said it wouldn't be worth while to tell Arnie another thing, she had already told him more than he would remember. They were locking the door when a touring-car drew up beside them and Bob McGill and Mary Deere waved their hands.

"Hullo!" called Bob as he jumped out. "Come on for a drive. We can have supper at the Country Club. How about it, Miss Grant?"

A hasty refusal was on Arnie's lips, although he wanted to go, of course. But Katie spoke first.

"I've never been to the Country Club."

"First time for everything!" Bob told her jubilantly. "Hop in!"

"We can't go!" exclaimed Arnie, while Mary stared at him. "Your aunt won't know where you are," he told Katie, for Aunt Rachel had taken the children to see their father in the hospital. He tried to signal to Katie to remember what he had told her about Bob; but Katie ignored his hints.

"I guess we can leave a note. I'll be ready in a minute, Mr. McGill. I must wash my hands." She showed him ten dusty fingers before she ran into the house.

Bob drew a long breath. "Some girl, all right, Arnie, old scout! You certainly selected the right man to run over when you took her brother. Has he a twin that I could smash?"

MARY gazed wistfully into Arnie's frowning face. "Don't you want to come, Arnie?" she asked. "Bob and I thought you would be tired and would like a ride."

He knew the thought had been hers, not Bob's, and as he looked into her troubled blue eyes his expression changed. It was a relief to see a girl like Mary after a day with a bristling porcupine like Katie. "Sure I want to go with you!" he said impetuously. "I'll be ready in a minute."

But he wasn't altogether pleased when Katie, quite as a matter of course, took the seat beside Bob.

"You get in with Mary," ordered Bob. "Then the cops can see you are minding them. Miss Grant will help me drive. Won't you?" He beamed on Miss Grant.

"That's what I'm going for, to see what people like you do," she told him calmly.

"Help!" he murmured. "We're going to be investigated. But that's all right so long as we aren't raided."

THEY had a jolly time at the club for, as Katie was an investigator, Bob insisted on showing her everything, and Katie looked on with big questioning eyes and made shrewd comments. Few people were about, but those who were stared at the little group and spoke in undertones. They all looked at Katie with admiration and curiosity, and she returned at least their curiosity. She was not at all shy, and in her short skirt and sweater, a sport hat she had trimmed herself pulled down on her red hair, looked much as the girls who had spent the day on the links looked. She was excited, as the color in her face showed, but she easily held her own even with Bob McGill.

"Now you've been to the Country Club," Bob said as he stopped the car in front of her home, "what do you think of us?"

"I think you're a bunch of loafers and wasters," she told him frankly.

"What!" he gasped. "No, don't tell me now. It's too late. I'll come over again, and you can explain it all to me. Loafers and wasters!"

"That's what I said! It's people like you who make socialists and anarchists. Thank you for an interesting experience. Good night, Miss Deere." Katie was as cool as any cucumber on the vine.

"Good night." Mary leaned from the car to offer her a slim hand. "I like you, Miss Grant," she said impulsively. "May I come and see you? Take good care of Arnie, please!"

Katie turned to Arnie when the car drove away. "It isn't fair!" she exclaimed fiercely. "It isn't fair for some people to have everything and for other people to have nothing! It isn't fair!"

"Why—why—" he stammered. But she was gone.

The store was horribly dingy and uninteresting the next day. Katie was at her kindergarten, and Carl grumbled that he had his own work to do when Arnie asked questions. There were not so many customers as there had been on Saturday. Arnie had time to stand in the door and wonder why on earth he was sticking it out. When Mary drove up in her smart little coupé she found him standing in front of the store staring at the dusty windows.

"Hullo, Mary," he said carelessly. "Did you ever see such a hole? What could a fellow do with it?"

"He could wash the windows," she suggested practically. "They are awfully dirty. And the things in the windows are the limit—enough to drive people away. Why don't you fix them?"

"What's the use?" he began, but something in her face made him shrug his shoulders. "All right. We'll wash the windows. Carl!" he called. "Suppose you wash these windows. They're a disgrace!"

"I gotta look over these potatoes," grumbled Carl. "I can't wash no windows today."

"Yes, you can!" insisted Arnie. "You can wash them this minute!"

There was an air of authority about Arnie. Carl could see that he was accustomed to being obeyed, and he grudgingly went for a pail. Mary and Arnie discussed the important question of what should replace the fly-specked window display.

"On Washington Avenue"—Mary named the street of exclusive shops—"they have only one hat in a window, sometimes, or just one gown. You've got some fine berries there, Arnie. Why not take a box of them and a bottle of cream and a loaf of bread—sort of suggest a nice combination? I'll show you."

When Carl moved to the other window, she made Arnie spread a piece of clean wrapping paper over the wide window ledge. She tilted a box of berries so that half of the big juicy fruit was spilled on the big leaves she put on the paper. A crusty loaf of bread was placed at one side and a bottle of cream at the other. Arnie and Mary went out and looked at the window.

"It seems kind of empty," criticized Arnie.

"It looks awfully inviting to me!" Mary cocked her head on one side. "It's much more appealing than a lot of stuff all higgledy-piggledy. In the other window—oh, I know!"

In the other window she arranged half a dozen big red tomatoes, a head of lettuce and a bunch of spring onions with a bottle of salad dressing and a box of crackers. Before they were placed to her liking a woman came in to ask if the berries were all as big, all through the box, as they showed in the window.

"If they are I'll take two boxes," she said. "Usually the big ones are all on top."

"You see!" beamed Mary. "A good window display does help! I'll come over every day and help you, Arnie. I'd love to!"

"Well, upon my word!" Katie, on her way to lunch, stopped to look at the windows. "Who did this?"

"Don't you like it?" Arnie was eager for her commendation.

"It certainly doesn't look crowded," she frowned.

"Clarice never puts but one hat in a window," he told her soberly.

She whirled around and stared at him. "You never thought of that yourself," she challenged.

"No," he admitted. But he did not tell her who had thought of it for him, and all through lunch she regarded him oddly. Perhaps there was more in him than she had thought.

ARNIE was most assuredly leading a different life. He got up at five instead of nine, and after drinking a glass of milk and eating the doughnuts Aunt Rachel had put out for him, drove to market. The judge had forbidden him to drive a car for three months but when Arnie reported the job he had taken Judge Gray coughed and looked at him strangely and then agreed that he might drive the wheezy old delivery car. He told Arnie that punishment would be swift and sure if he used the car for any other purpose than business. Arnie grinned.

The first day Carl went with him and showed him where to buy the vegetables and fruit. After that he went alone. Carl had to open the store and take care of the early customers, who had forgotten to get bread or milk the day before. Breakfast was ready when Arnie came back and at half-past seven he was in the store helping Carl arrange what he had bought.

After the first shock of getting up in what he declared was the middle of the night Arnie really enjoyed these early expeditions. It was fun to bargain with the farmers or their wives, to look over the piles of fresh vegetables. He joked with the women and they laughed and joked with him. When he was able to find a bargain he felt as if he had cornered the steel market until he told the story to Katie and her cool lack of commendation reminded him that all he had done was to buy a bushel of onions at less than the market price.

Aunt Rachel was soon devoted to him. Little Bert and Elsie liked him, too, and trotted around after him when they were not in school. Every other day Arnie went to the hospital and told Grant what was being done at the store. He hated these visits most of all, but Grant met him with a fairness which made him even more ashamed. Grant seemed to understand that Arnie was trying to make amends.

"Don't mind Katie," he told Arnie. "She's a little firebrand. She thinks the world should agree with her. That's because she is young. When she gets older she'll learn that she'll have to agree with the world if she wants to be happy. Too bad, isn't it, that we can't keep our ideals?"

Arnie could not imagine a Katie calmed and quieted by age. He hated the suggestion. Katie's flashing indignation against injustice of all kinds was what interested him in her even if her indignation flamed against him.

The business was simple. Bert had been satisfied with making a living out of the store and a cash system meant easy bookkeeping. There were problems which puzzled Arnie and when Carl and Aunt Rachel could not help him he carried them to Grant and they worked them out together. Katie laughed at him when he spoke of them to her. She acted as if everybody should know how to run a grocery store.

His father dropped in two or three times at odd hours as if he expected to find him shirking. He had been surprised at Arnie. The first week he had rather expected the boy to show some attention to business, but the second and the third week came and went and Arnie was still weighing cheese for Mrs. Melchis or pulling off garlic cloves for the Pierottis. And those early-morning trips! If Arnie carried on here for three months perhaps he might be worth something after all. Mr. Welles had been sadly afraid that Arnie never would amount to anything.

ALWAYS Arnie had Mary to admire him and sympathize with him. Mary quickly made friends with the Grants and came over nearly every day. She drove Aunt Rachel and the children to the hospital, she helped Arnie with the window displays and she dropped in to see Katie, who never minced matters but told Mary exactly what she thought of her for being the daughter of a millionaire. Katie seemed to enjoy finding fault with Arnie and laughed when Mary flew to defend him, as she always did.

"You aren't fair!" Mary would cry, her cheeks aflame. "You pride yourself on being so fair, but you're not a bit fair to Arnie!"

"Neither are you!" Katie retorted. "No matter what he does, you admire him. You couldn't be fair to him!"

"Why, Katie Grant!" Mary was scarlet.

"What are you two chewing the rag over?" Arnie would ask as he came out to join them. And both girls would toss their heads and tell him, "Nothing."

Mary made him feel like a man who could do anything, and Katie turned him into a worm who could do nothing but crawl abjectly on his stomach. And yet there was something stimulating about Katie. She was so ambitious herself that she made him ashamed not to be ambitious, too. She made him wonder about her friend Joe Thomson, who was still on the road. He must be a wonder to have won a girl as ambitious and clever and good-looking as Katie Grant. Bob McGill might as well stay at home. Katie would never look at him twice. Bob came over often to ask Katie to go with him to the club, but Katie always shook her head.

"Once was enough," she declared. But when she saw his disappointment she relented. "Perhaps I'll let you teach me golf and surprise Joe when he comes home. But we'll play on the City Links. I won't go where I don't belong."

And so the four young people went on Sunday to the City Links, where men who knew Arnie and Bob by sight would grumble that they ought to go to their clubs and not crowd the municipal course.

"Listen to that!" Bob called Katie's attention to the complaints. "Shall I tell them it's your fault?"

"As you please." Katie never cared what people said if she thought she was right. "Tell me again: Is this the way I place my hands?"

Mary and Arnie, who had played since they were children, had gone on. Bob took her hand to place her fingers, but first he squeezed them.

"I don't care how much you despise me!" he told her fiercely. "I think you are the finest girl in the world!"

She raised her head to say hot and scornful words, but as she met his eyes she flushed and her heart flew into her throat, because, she told herself quickly, she so thoroughly despised his type.

"I don't consider the admiration of a loafer and a waster any compliment," she managed to stammer.

THEN it was Bob who flushed. He did not say anything more but he trailed soberly after her. He did not come over for almost a week. Arnie was too busy to miss him, and Katie never said a word. She did not care if she had called him names. They were true, and if Bob McGill couldn't stand the truth he need not come near her. And it was true that admiration from loafers and wasters was an insult. When Bob did come at last he walked in with his head high.

"You can't call me names any longer," he told Katie. "Ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce you to Waloo's newest bond salesman. Oh, I know, Katie Grant, that you don't think that is as good a job as digging in the streets, but somebody has to sell bonds, and if I take on the dirty stuff I can release some other chap to dig in the street. Honest, I've gone to work!"

"It's time, I'll say!" was Katie's reaction. She laughed. "I don't admit that it is necessary for any man to sell bonds, but perhaps now you have gone to work you'll have what I call a real job some day."

"I think he's wonderful!" Mary gave Katie a most reproachful glance. "I don't see how you can say such unkind things."

"Perhaps you could if you had to teach an old kindergarten all day!" flashed Katie. "You never did anything in your life but ride around and spend money!"

Arnie jumped to his feet. "You make me tired, Katie!" he said. "You can say what you please about me and Bob, but leave Mary alone! She's all right, as she is. Don't mind her, Mary." He turned to the flushed and tearful Mary. "You're all right!" He stammered as he told her how all right she was.

"Am I, Arnie?" Mary stammered, too. "Then I don't care what Katie says."

Katie looked at them. There was as much envy as scorn in her eyes. "Oh, you two!" she retorted.

It wasn't long before Arnie found himself regretting that his job was so easy. He really had a good mind; he had inherited business ability from his father, and he told Mary he wished there were some real problems.

Mary did not answer him. She was staring at a row of bottles and painted cans. "Where do nutmegs come from, Arnie?" she asked suddenly. "And tapioca? And what on earth is sago?"

"How the dickens should I know?" he had to answer. But that evening when he had nothing to do he looked up nutmeg and tapioca in Bert's old encyclopedia. It was rather amusing to read about the stuff he handled. College had taught him nothing about groceries. He began to talk to the city salesmen about their lines. Bert told him thrilling tales about cinnamon and tea. Bert advised him to visit the local food manufacturers, and he did. He came back eager to tell Carl and the customers what he had seen. His interest made the customers interested, and he sold more pickles and flour and cereals. Carl was hopeless. He refused to get excited over the system by which the pickles were packed. Arnie became curious about transportation. A whole new field was opened to him.

He had always liked people and all at once he discovered that nowhere had he met stranger or more absorbing people than in the little store. People of all nations came there. The neighborhood gossip amused him. He liked to talk to the new Americans and to hear what they had to say of the old and new countries. He astonished his father on the evenings when he dropped in to see him, by his opinions on world conditions.

"By George, the boy has a brain!" the delighted old A. J. Welles would mutter.

TO BE sure Arnie made mistakes and took chances. There was the day he bought a wagonload of cabbages. Katie stormed at him and declared he couldn't put the neighborhood on cabbage soup, that Bert never bought more than a couple of dozen cabbages at a time. Arnie had to make a house-to-house canvass before he sold those cabbages, and he was never so mortified in his life as he was when he had to confess to Katie that he had lost ninety-eight cents on the load.

There was another day when he ordered twenty-five boxes of laundry soap. Arnie's knowledge of soap had been obtained from the expensive toilet variety, three cakes in a decorated pasteboard box, and twenty-five times three cakes of soap did not seem too many for the store to stock. When the truck unloaded the twenty-five wooden boxes he was the most amazed man in the grocery business.

"Say, what you going to do now?" grumbled Carl. "Mr. Grant, he never bought but one box at a time."

"Well, upon my word!" gasped Katie, when she had to pick her way between the piles of soap boxes. "What have you done now? You'll never sell them!"

"I will sell them!" Arnie set his jaw in a line which his father's friends would have recognized as old A. J.'s fighting face.

He went to the telephone and called up a friend who had majored in chemistry and consequently should know all about soap. "What's the dope on buying soap in quantities?" he demanded. He had to explain further, before his friend laughed and told him many things about soap.

Mary helped him arrange attractive window displays of the soap and heard him rehearse his selling talk. The women laughed when he told them they could not afford to buy one cake at a time, that soap lasted twice as long if the cakes were unwrapped and allowed to dry before they were used.

"Go on," grinned old Mrs. Weinkop. "Don't teach your grandmother to milk ducks. I used soap long before you were thought of!"

The first day he did not sell half a dozen cakes. Katie sniffed scornfully, and even Aunt Rachel shook her head. But the second day Mrs. Weinkop bought a dozen cakes. The janitor of a big apartment building on Thirty-second Street, who came in for some ammonia, took a box. It was the first time that the Neighborhood Store had ever sold a box of soap in one order.

That night it was Arnie who sniffed at Katie, and who told Aunt Rachel it was all right, the soap was moving.

It was actually the soap which made the receipts show an increase. Arnie walked on air when he made the comparison. He felt that he could buy and sell anything. His ambition was at last roused. He determined that he would increase the increase. He would show Katie Grant. He was really far more businesslike than Grant had ever been. Grant had been inclined to let things ride and be satisfied with a small profit. Arnie had the heritage of a shrewd money-making father and grandfather. He had been a joy-seeker because his friends were joy-seekers, but now that he had been brought face to face with business he discovered that he liked it and that it held as much excitement as golf or polo.

"This grocery business," he told his father, "is something pretty close to the people. I believe I like it."

"How would you like to keep on with it?" Welles asked curiously. "I mean the wholesale end."

"From now on I get my own job," Arnie said. "It's more fun. And I'm not interested in the wholesale end. It's the retail, the association with people, I like. I'd rather have a chain of small stores than all the wholesale places in the world! I'd start with one," he went on with enthusiasm, "and when I'd made a success of it I'd take on another and another until I had a chain all over Waloo. And then perhaps I would have a chain in other cities, all the cities in the country!" His eyes flashed.

This was an ambition that old A. J. could understand. He sat up straighter. By George, the boy was awake at last! He had been afraid that Arnie would never open his eyes. "Now you're talking," he said to Arnie. "And I'll help you!"

"Don't want your help," Arnie told him carelessly. "Want to work this thing out myself. Maybe I'll take old Grant in with me. I suppose I owe him something. Katie says—"

"I hope you aren't interested in that girl, Arnie?" interrupted his father, who was not used to having his financial help refused; and he could have bitten his tongue for the indiscreet words.

Arnie's head shot up. "I guess it's my affair if I am!" he said shortly.

"Quite right, it is," admitted his father. "But she isn't the type for you, my boy, unless you want to be bossed for the rest of your life."

"That," grandly remarked Arnie again, "is my affair!"

It was, he said to himself as he tramped the long way back to Grant's. His affair—and Katie's, of course. Katie was a wonder. He had thought that from the day he first met her. She was pretty and clever and ambitious. Lord, but she was ambitious! She would keep a fellow on his toes. But there was Joe Thomson! Arnie frowned. And Bob McGill! Bob was still hanging around Katie and boasting that last month he had made enough to buy cream for his breakfast coffee. And—there was Mary, too. He was beginning to see that while their methods differed Mary and Katie had a good deal in common.

HIS father had raised another question: What was he going to do when he had served his sentence? He couldn't go back to the old careless, aimless days. Judge Gray had jolted him out of them and made him realize that he was a man; and a man wanted two things, a job and a wife. A funny feeling ran over him as he thought of himself with a wife. If he had a wife he would want to take care of her himself, not live on an allowance from his father. No, sir, if he couldn't support a wife he would never have one! Katie had taught him that. Katie and Judge Gray! He had learned a lot from Katie.

It is amazing how time can fly. One day followed another so uneventfully—there was the store, there was disturbing Katie, there was Bob, and there was faithful Mary coming over every day or so to tell him how wonderful he was—that Arnie did not keep track of them. They were scarcely through with strawberries, it seemed to him, before peaches were in the windows. Arnie was actually surprised when he heard that Grant was ready to come home from the hospital—as good as new, he said jubilantly. When he returned Arnie would be through, his sentence served. Arnie was almost sorry. Katie seemed sorry, too. They talked it over the night before Grant returned.

"I thought you were a sure-enough slacker," she told him with her usual disconcerting frankness. "I thought all your kind was a menace to the world, but I've learned that the reason I thought so was because I was jealous and envious and ignorant. I wanted what you had, and because I couldn't have it I called you names."

"You didn't call me any name I didn't deserve," Arnie admitted honestly. "I certainly was one sweep. Of course I'm sorry I ran down your brother, but I'm glad Judge Gray took the stand he did. It brought me up short and made me realize what a wild hyena I was. It was tough on you and your brother, but it was the medicine I needed. I'm glad the judge had the sand to send me here!"

"I don't know as it was so tough for Bert and me. Bert has had a chance to get a good rest and to think things over as he hasn't thought of them since Elsie died. I honestly believe he has some of his old ambition back. And as for me—well, you've widened my outlook and given me some new friends." Her voice wavered as she spoke of what he had done for her. "Here's two of them now!" she exclaimed as a car stopped at the curb, and Bob called to them. Mary waved her hand.

IN FIVE minutes they were out on a country road, Katie on the front seat with Bob, and Arnie with Mary in the tonneau.

"Tomorrow you'll be home again, Arnie," Mary whispered to him. "I wonder if you'll be satisfied. There isn't any one in our crowd like Katie," she told him wistfully.

He turned to her. Involuntarily his hand caught hers. "You'll be there!" he said quickly. "And you're the girl that counts! Katie's a peach, of course. But I want a girl like—"

"Yes?" interrupted Mary, and the color left her face white as milk. She gave his hand a little shake. "Tell me what the girl you want must be like, Arnie!"

Arnie looked at her. His heart was beating, too. He had always been a trifle arrogant with girls, but he did not feel arrogant now. He was humble and uncertain. "Like you," he whispered, and his arm slipped around her and drew her closer to him. "I never would have lived through these three months if you hadn't stood by me. I'm not the selfish hound you found fault with, honey. I've learned that other people have rights. I'm not much of a chap yet, but I love you and I want you. How about it? Will you take a chance with me?"

She leaned against him. "Oh, Arnie!"

ON THE front seat Katie was sighing and saying to Bob: "I suppose this is the last time you'll drive over to our house?"

He looked at her in astonishment. "What do you mean? Why should it be the last time? You mean because Arnie's through? Well, I'm not through! I know you haven't any use for chaps like me. Heaven knows I should, for you've told me so often enough! But I don't care! I'm going to keep on rushing you until you marry this Thomson guy, and even then I shan't be discouraged. There are such things as divorces."

In spite of the lightness of Bob's words there was a strong undercurrent of seriousness which made Katie look up at him quickly.

"There will never be any divorce for me," she told him flatly. "When I marry I marry for keeps!"

"Is that so? Then this Thomson—"

"I'll never marry Joe Thomson," she said impulsively. "Joe and I are good friends, but that's all!"

He took his hand from the wheel to put it on her fingers.

"Then I have a chance?" he asked eagerly. "You don't altogether despise me, Katie Grant?"

"No, I don't despise you. I tried to, but I couldn't because you were so—so"—she floundered for a word—"you! I really like you a lot," she confessed honestly.

"Glory be!" he cried. "You won't be sorry, old girl! You can make anything out of me! Honest, you can! Why, already you've made a bond salesman out of nothing. If you give me your entire attention you can make anything out of a bond salesman!"

"As if I didn't know that!" she said with a touch of her old scorn. "That's why I'm so crazy about you. Because I see your possibilities, I mean!"

Ex-Has-Been

Introducing Mose Perkins, Another of Those Human Racetrack Characters You Have Met in "Weather Clear, Track Fast" and "The Fourth Big Brother"

By Sam Carson

MOSE PERKINS leaned over the infield rail at Churchill Downs, gazing absently at a group of shivering horsemen before the judges' stand. It was cold for October, more so since a chill northwest gale whipped around the buildings, to hasten on toward the Kentucky Bluegrass country. The old darky turned up his coat collar and shuffled his distant feet. Distant was right, for Mose was unusually tall, although his beady black eyes were undimmed for all his time-sculptured face.

A ragged negro boy trotted down the sloppy track leading a lanky bay thoroughbred.

"Look at 'im, gentlemen," the auctioneer droned. "Oldham Cloud, by Oldham-Lady Cloud. Good sprinter—everybody knows 'im. How much am I— Two hundred. I'm offered two hundred. Who'll gimme the two-fifty? Two-fifty I have—who'll gimme the three hundred? Three hundred! Are you all up?"

"Sounds like a harness hawss," drawled a voice behind Mose. "Whose sale is this, anyway?"

Mose turned, his lips relaxing into a smile. "Howdy, Mist' Ed. Ain't seen you since last fall. They're selling off Mist' Nicky White's hawsses. He's dead."

"H'm!" observed the newcomer. "Did hear about it, but forgot. Who's putting on the sale—his creditors?"

"Jedge Roberts," the darky explained. "Mist' Nicky lef' three children. Jedge had hisself 'p'inted execut—ex—" He gave it up. "Had hisself 'p'inted to sell them hawsses so's to sen' the children down to Hoptown, where their gran'pap lives."

The white man nodded, and, because he was stout, grunted as he climbed the fence. Mose remained, once again immobile.

It was an extraordinary sale, held Monday morning the last week of the fall meeting. Nicky White had ended an alcoholic existence the Saturday before. A bit befuddled, he hastened departure in the darkness of his room when his shaky hand closed about the neck of the wrong bottle. Nicky had been on a prolonged spree; the bottle he had selected happened to be a germicide—every bit as powerful as the manufacturer's claim. It was the coroner who learned from the trio of tearful children that Nicky had been keeping his stable remedies in his room.

Judge Roberts, tall, his hair whitened by a wealth of years, was no longer an active racing official; rather, he was a steward emeritus, one whose opinions were universally respected. He discovered the plight of Nicky White's motherless family, investigated, winding up with an inventory of the White stable. The result was a hurried trip to the county judge, another conference with juvenile court officials, then a judicial order which gave the former steward the right to dispose of Nicky White's five horses as he saw fit.

Nicky White had belonged to a type familiar at every race course. Never more than a jump ahead of the sheriff, he existed; and that was about all. To his credit, he never abused his children; but he never helped them, either, considering all contributing factors. They were clothed and fed; and that was enough—for Nicky.

Judge Roberts sent out a summons by many and devious channels, then telephoned an auctioneer. A small group responded, some out of curiosity, others because they were eager to aid the children. And now, Judge Roberts stood in the pagoda shaking his head; Oldham Cloud had raised the fund to five hundred dollars. It was about his true worth—three hundred dollars. An ancient mare had brought one hundred dollars, while a veterinarian had used a six-shooter on the eldest of the White string that morning. The remaining thoroughbred, a veteran plater, had been bought out of charity—at a hundred dollars.

The group was about to scatter when the auctioneer stepped forward again.

"Just a minute," he appealed. "We're going to sell one horse Nicky White has never raced. There he comes," he ended, pointing dramatically up the track.

The "he" was a blazed-faced chestnut gelding, limping, urged on by the negro boy.

"The great I am!" exclaimed a veteran trainer. "Shelby Prince ain't dead yet. And Nicky White owned him!"

There was some laughter, but the men, as a whole, stared, half in sorrow, partly in wonder. Shelby Prince had been a great handicap horse nearly a decade before. He had dropped out of sight. Only a few remembered that Nicky White had purchased the thoroughbred five years before, with the ambition to put the animal back on the track for one winning race.

JUDGE ROBERTS stepped forward. "My friends," he began, "all of you remember Shelby Prince—how he won the Clark—and the Proctor Knott. And if he hadn't been in that collision at Latonia the day Ned Little was killed, he would have been a worthy rival of Exterminator as a money-winning gelding.

"Up to this sale," he continued, "we have raised five hundred dollars. I would like to get at least two hundred more for the children. Shelby Prince is eleven years old. He may have another race in his system. Somebody buy him."

Bill Hargis, an owner who could hold his own with the craftiest of gypsies in the matter of horse-trading, cleared his throat; he was thinking of Nicky's children. "I'll give seventy-five dollars, judge. And I'll pay for burying the hawss," he added.

"I'll make it a hundred—on the same basis," spoke up another owner.

Judge Roberts beamed. "I understand —and appreciate," he observed. "A hundred, I'm offered. Who'll raise the bid? One hundred—once—"

"Hunerd an' fifty," sounded a distant voice.

Mose Perkins, shed of his detached attitude, held an upraised hand. For once, he was an object of interest—an astonishing object.

"Did I hear you right?" Judge Roberts demanded. "One hundred and fifty dollars, Mose?"

"Yassuh—that's whut I said, jedge."

"Well—you bought a hawss," declared Hargis. "That old fox must have known hides were going up."

Hargis was right. The White sale was over a few seconds later. Lowering clouds bearing the menace of snow swept out of the northwest and hurried the departure of the sale attendants. Judge Roberts descended from the pagoda and, except for the boy who held Shelby Prince, alone awaited Mose Perkins's deliberate approach.

"How are you going to pay for this horse?" Judge Roberts inquired.

Mose took the halter and surveyed his purchase. "Well, jedge, "he said, "Mist' Blakely's got my money—in the bank. I'll jus' git a check when I sees him this evenin'."

"Bring it around and I'll give you a bill of sale," Judge Roberts directed. He gazed at Shelby Prince speculatively. "I'm curious what you intend to do with him," he mused. "If there ever was a has-been, that horse certainly is."

The darky scratched his head reflectively. "You cain't never tell, jedge," he explained. "This yere hawss might have a bunch of races cooped up in his system. Comes somebody whut'll nurse 'im along an' he might produce. Say, jedge," he asked, "if I git this Shelby Prince on the track next year, kin I run 'im—as my hawss?"

"Why not?" Judge Roberts countered. "So long as you pay the fees and have everything regular, the horse can go under your colors—same as any other owner. But if I owned him, I'd trade him off to some sucker the first chance."

"Thankee, jedge—thankee," Mose replied. "Come on, hawss. You shore is a has-been now."

Judge Roberts watched darky and horse turn into the infield, their progress slow. A flake of hard snow struck his face—another—and he hurried to the secretary's office. "I'd give a dollar to hear Big Jim Blakely blow up when Mose leads that cripple into one of Jim's stalls," he mused.

NEWS travels as swiftly about racing stables as in any grim censored prison. From building to building sped the word that Mose Perkins had acquired a thoroughbred, the price increasing with each relayed report. Owl Head Jackson, who was a bare year younger than Mose, and was veteran stableman of the Florella Manor employees, hastily organized a welcoming committee. Owl Head was both stouter and shorter than Mose; moreover, age had been more lenient in the matter of toll; but in the item of color, they were one—velvety black.

A dozen braved the snow flurry to greet Mose. Advancing from the Blakely stable, the Florella stableman removed his hat and bowed low. "Pahdon th' weathuh, Mist' Mose," he begged. "Th' weathuh man wusn't informed of this event or he wouldn't have jus' nachurally ruined the landscape." He stared at Shelby Prince, recognized the aged thoroughbred. Turning to his grinning companions, he held up his hand. "Somebody's done gone an' prevaricated," he announced. "Gentlem'n, I leaves it to you-all. This hawss has got fo' laigs. An' heah I gets up fr'm my nap 'cause some fool nigger hollers out that Mist' Mose done bought a three-legged hawss whut kin outrun Man-o'-Wah."

Mose resorted to dignity against this sarcasm. "They's a suttin fool nigger's goin' to git his haid pulled from his shoulders loose," he asserted. "Reckon I kin buy a five-legged hawss if I want to."

"Calm yoreself—calm yoreself, Mist' Mose," Owl Head advised. "Don't grow noisatin' 'roun' heah. You ain't got no grand razz comin', has you? You ain't gone an' stung yoreself, is you? Well, I isn't heard of any man whut makes new laigs fo' hawsses. An' you suttinly needs a new one fo' Shelby Prince."

"I'll tend to my own business," Mose retorted with heat. "An' I don' need no advice from any nigger wukkin' fo' the Florella folks, eithuh. Anyway, you ain't got no racer, has you?"

"No—I ain't," Owl Head admitted. "An' neithuh is you. You got a race hawss with race subtracted. You own an animule with fo' laigs minus. You bought a has plus bin; tha's whut you done. You owes an apology to yoreself."

Mose returned to injured dignity. He was no match in repartee with Owl Head and realized that fact. So, with a high head, he tugged at the halter and began to urge Shelby Prince to the haven of a warm stall. He forbore to recognize Owl Head's parting shot: "Jus' you wait till Mist' Blakely ketches that hawss in his oats. He'll take th' hide off'n you and yore broken-down hawss too."

Mose led his charge inside and slid the door, cutting off sounds of mirth outside. Owl Head's final remarks were timely; they covered the darky's chief problem. First, he must accept a fiery dressing-down from his employer to obtain the purchase money for Shelby Prince; but that, he was fairly certain, would result in Blakely simmering down, then dashing off a check. No, Mose feared extreme opposition to wintering his horse at Pleasant Vale, Blakely's stock farm in the Bluegrass. The darky recalled old Uncle Zeb Whittaker, dean of stablemen, his service dating from the time Colonel Blakely, first of the family, held forth at Pleasant Vale. Uncle Zeb in his dotage bought crippled thoroughbreds and worthless hounds, showing up at the farm, to be exiled again and again.

But Uncle Zeb and Colonel Blakely had long since passed away. Still, the man known to the racing world as Big Jim remembered. And Mose certainly wasn't in his second childhood. True, he had asked Blakely, years ago, to start banking his funds; Mose had a dislike to living out his final days as a pensioner. He was thrifty and, without knowledge of the fact, had more than a thousand dollars to his credit in his employer's name. The darky knew Blakely would object heatedly to what he considered a waste of funds; but it was partly a matter of sentiment, likewise a long repressed ambition, to own his very own racehorse. Although he had never had more than a few glimpses of Shelby Prince except in action as a youngster, Mose felt that reverence every lover of thoroughbreds experiences when he sees the aged who have lived their days of greatness. The probability that he could obtain Shelby Prince for a small sum had drawn him to the auction; and he was fully determined to get a check from Blakely and take his chances for the future.

Mose tied Shelby Prince's halter to a stanchion and made for the feed room. He returned with a well filled bucket. "Hawss," he cautioned, "do yore heavy eatin' now. Cover up them ribs as fast as you kin, for I don' know whut we're goin' to do this wintuh."

Shelby Prince gazed at the grain box with joy unalloyed. Tiny muscles along his body wriggled in sheer ecstasy. He gave forth a sigh of relief. Being dumb, he could not explain to Mose the long days of near famine during Nicky White's last days. But his manner of attack was a revelation; he ate with the speed of an animal doubting a repetition of such luck.

"You shore ain't no racer—yet," Mose observed; "but you suttinly kin make time in a feed box. But you ain't got no troubles. Me, I got a plenty."

BLAKELY was irate. Mose noted certain signals in the angle of his employer's unlighted cigar. The darky had constructed a plausible alibi to obtain one hundred and fifty dollars. Blakely's searching glance, accompanied by a challenging "Well!" made a world of difference. Mose asked for his money for "pussonal" reasons.

"Personal, my foot!" Blakely snorted, shifting his huge bulk, which seemed to fill the tiny stable office. "You want to pay for that bargain-counter cripple. I know. A half-dozen have already been kidding me about that boneyard candidate."

Something about his employer's bluster reassured Mose. Colonel Blakely had been the same sort of man, quick to get huffy, quicker to grasp the humor of any situation. Big Jim Blakely was a larger man, face more than sunburned the year around; florid; aggressive. But the Blakelys had many traits in common, most of them fine to possess.

"Once," Big Jim mused, "I wanted Shelby Prince myself. Always thought he was trained wrong. But now—well, anything can be too late."

"I sort of liked him, too," Mose ventured, "—sence he was a colt. Maybe I kin git him back—for one moah race."

Blakely leaned back in his creaking chair. Mose twisted his ancient felt hat, hopeful of a decision his way; for although Blakely had control of his money because the darky couldn't even sign his own name, Mose would not have protested if his employer decided against buying Shelby Prince.

"H'm!" The decision was coming. "H'm!" And Blakely brought out his check book. "You're a fool, Mose. A plain, long-legged, doddering old fool. That horse can't ever win. Here's your check. And get me straight —don't show up at Pleasant Vale farm with that cripple. You remember Uncle Zeb? Well, I don't want any more around like him. You're an owner now—keep him somewhere else this winter."

Mose was too happy to be depressed by this ultimatum. Besides, that was in the future. There was always some way of getting by. His optimism was increased when the stables cleaned up on a getaway day race—a frame-up. Mose had a five-dollar ticket; it returned him thirty-two.

November was passing with the cold, drab manner it has. But there wasn't any cause for thanksgiving in Mose Perkins's world. He had attempted to live by too high a standard and his downfall resulted thereby. A disconcerting thing about money is its capacity for shrinkage. Whereas Mose had gone to the well furnished and socially correct boarding-house of Sister Arabella Stump at the zenith of his glory as a racehorse owner, he was now in his nadir of despondency. Mose had lived well—too well—for six weeks. Thereafter he had existed. Therefore it wasn't strange that Sister Arabella confronted a huge patent-medicine calendar in her living-room, pencil stuck thoughtfully in her mouth alongside a wad of gum. There were names on that calendar—in fact a round dozen—inscribed beneath the blackface numerals. For a moment Sister Arabella pursed her chocolate-brown lips; then she drew a ring around the name of Mose Perkins. That simple action meant that Mose, who was in arrears for food and lodging, was to be eliminated shortly—before night—his effects confiscated and a rent sign replaced in the living-room window.

Sister Arabella belonged to the buxom class. As a matter of fact, she leaned toward the Amazon type. She claimed to be a widow, but there were rumors that her former husband had departed abruptly before an onslaught of weapons ranging from a hot iron to well directed revolver fire. There was no doubt that Sister Arabella was capable; Mose had already learned that fact. There had been a brief interview at breakfast hour. She couldn't understand why a gentleman who owned a racehorse should be broke. A man who had money in the bank should be able to get it out, she contended. What good did it do to turn it over to the white folks? Mose explained that Blakely was up East and wouldn't return for a week at least. She accepted the explanation tentatively, but reserved judgment, meanwhile advising him to seek nourishment elsewhere.

As usual, troubles began to double up. Two hours later, down at Churchill Downs, Mose heard from an angry feed merchant who insisted that he wasn't supporting Shelby Prince for nothing. Furthermore, he promised to get out an attachment for the horse unless the price of five bags of oats was met by Saturday night.

Left alone with his charge, Mose sat down on the feed box, staring at Shelby Prince gloomily. "Looks lak a hahd wintuh, hawss," he announced, "—you out of feed and me out of grub and a bed. Wish I could fin' Mist' Blakely."

There arose a dim idea that Judge Roberts could help. At least he might give advice. The darky recalled that Blakely's friend resided at the Pendennis Club downtown.

It is a long walk from Churchill Downs to Fourth and Walnut, long enough for the pedestrian who has breakfasted well. More than an hour elapsed before Mose shuffled up to the gray-walled building, to be challenged by a negro in tan livery.

"What you want?" he demanded.

"I'm lookin' fo' Jedge Roberts. He's my white folks."

"Huh!" The doorman was suspicious. "Seems lak to me Judge has a yellow boy wuks at his house."

"Tha's me," Mose affirmed eagerly; "I'm his house boy."

"You!" the doorman scoffed. "You his boy! Go 'way."

Desperation inspired Mose to action. "Nigger," he announced, "I'm plumb busted. An' I craves to eat. Does th' Pendennis folks hire a new flunky or does you stan' back?"

The doorman wavered. Mose seemed to grow taller and fiercer. At last the liveried one compromised. "You stay heah," he advised. "I'll see if he's inside." He reached the safety of the door, turned. "Who does I say waits fo' him?"

"Mose Perkins, tha's all. He knows."

The door closed, and Mose regarded the interior, visible through a glass panel, with misgivings. He was tired and a little frightened. Suppose Judge Roberts should be angry at this intrusion. White folks were funny about being bothered. But an empty stomach and no future relief was one of the most stubborn facts Mose understood. Besides, there was Shelby Prince.

The doorman returned; to Mose, he seemed triumphant. "Out of town," he said, "with some racehawss folks, Mist' Blakely and some moah. Guess you don' eat."

MOSE was too dispirited to reply. His feet seemed leaden; and there was a gnawing internally. He turned west, crossed Fourth Street and headed for the colored section. Surely he could find a friend. True, he wasn't so well acquainted in the Tenth and Walnut district; his plunge into high society hadn't lasted long enough. But there was a chance. A wind that seemed to have taken a dip into the icy Ohio before sweeping the city, caused him to turn up his coat collar. At Center Street he paused, his mind running over a list of possible benefactors. His line of thought was distracted by a monotonous chant which grew louder and more insistent.

"I got coal—I got ice. I'm the coal man—I'm the ice man."

At the mention of ice Mose shivered. Down Center, alongside the Armory building came a ramshackle wagon drawn by a fuzzy-haired, decrepit horse whose harness was a veritable patchwork of strings and leather. A darky as old as Mose perched upon a box, his body lurching as the wagon wheels swerved, first to the right, then to the left.

The negro repeated his coal and ice advertisement, crossing to the same side as Mose.

Any man who had nerve enough to offer ice in such weather possessed unusual capabilities, Mose reasoned. He moved to the sidewalk curb. "Howdy!" he greeted.

"Howdy!" the driver returned. "They ain't buying no ice today."

"Maybe it's a little too col'," Mose suggested.

"Shore is," the driver replied. "When I offer 'em ice, they shakes an' buys coal. Ain't got no ice anyway. Name's Smith," he added. "I does all kin's of haulin'."

"Glad to know you, Mist' Smith," Mose observed. "Know a whole lot of folks name of Smith. I'm Mose Perkins." Here his eye rested upon a purple and white celluloid badge adorning the Smith lapel. He took in the wondrous devices wrought thereon. Suddenly he raised his right hand, even with the chin, and made a sweeping gesture. The effect upon the ice and coal salesman was electric. He repeated the arm movement and waited.

"Is you a man?" Mose challenged.

"I'm a brothuh to man," came the response. Here the driver alighted from his vehicle.

"Then grip me, brothuh—grip me," Mose invited, extending his right hand.

They gripped.

"Fust name's Ephram—Ephram Smith," the driver elucidated. "Somethin' tells me you needs a frien'."

"That somethin' ain't tol' you no lies," said Mose. "I don' need nothin' else but."

And to his fellow member of the Brotherhood of the Purple Robe, Mose Perkins detailed his many troubles. Later he produced a card, showing that in his more affluent days he had been thoughtful enough to pay up his lodge dues.

"You eats with me," Ephram decided. "But whut is it you aims to do—hereafter?"

"I wants to go up to Mist' Blakely's fahm—over neah Shelbyville."

"Is you got much—to tote?"

"Le's see," Mose pondered. "I got a cot—an' telescope—an' work clothes—an' a race-hawss." He surveyed the Smith equipage. "I could git my plunder on a one-hawss wagon, yassuh. An' I could tie Shelby Prince on behin'. Yassuh," he added thoughtfully; "all of it kin go on a one-hawss wagon."

"Tell you whut," Ephram offered. "Wait till tomorrow. I'm goin' down to Shelbyville myself. Got a lil haulin' to do fo' a brothuh in distress. I'll shore take care of yourself."

"I'm mighty 'bliged," Mose began by way of thanks, then paused. "Could—could you spare a stall fo' Shelby Prince? I jus' got to git him away from the Downs. The feed man's after me."

Ephram considered. "Ain't got much room—stable's in an alley. Reckon we kin fix it up some way. Jus' climb on an' I'll take you to dinner. Git up, Cephas!"

Cephas jerked a fleabitten ear, moved sundry muscles as a preliminary, and leaned cautiously against his patchwork harness. He displayed a trifle of enthusiasm; instinctively Cephas knew he was headed for home.

WITH an inquiring whinny, Shelby Prince greeted his owner, who slid stealthily into the stall at eleven o'clock that night.

"Keep quiet, hawss," Mose admonished. "Our circulatin' time's come. An' I'm fixin' to pay yore stable an' feed bill."

Shelby Prince submitted peacefully enough to this invasion; the horse had become accustomed to this sort of business under Nick White's ownership. Besides, this lavish period of grain and hay was too good to last long. Shelby Prince sighed and bade the stall farewell. The next hour was consumed in transit over a devious route, beginning with the opening of a narrow track gate below the stables, and leading downtown through silent streets and alleys. Presently they turned into a dirtier alley than any traversed and Mose halted before a wood and tin building, hardly more than a shack. Untwisting wire from about a clasp, he swung the wabbly door outward and urged Shelby Prince inside. The thoroughbred pulled back at his halter. The atmosphere was abrupt, to say the least. Directly behind the venerable Cephas reposed two goats, property of Joe Taylor. Joe was minus both legs, his means of transportation a tiny wagon drawn by the goat team. But just now, Joe was minus something else—his liberty. His signature to three checks, unfinanced, and cashed by trustful colored citizens, was responsible for the translation. The law did not recognize the streak of chivalry burning within Joe's wide chest when he discovered a fair, high brown damsel in distress. Consequently Joe reposed within the stout confines of the Jefferson County jail; and Ephram, always obliging, was caring for the goats.

Mose paid Shelby Prince a brief farewell and hastened on to the lodge room. A committee of the Purple Brotherhood was waiting; it had raised nineteen dollars and thirty cents, exactly enough to recover the Perkins belongings from Sister Arabella's clutches. . . .

It was a dandy feast Mose was dreaming about when Ephram entered with a lantern an hour before daylight. Liza, Blakely's own cook, had just deposited a monster platter upon a snowy tablecloth in her own immaculate dining-room. On that platter was one of the most tantalizing dishes ever invented—barbecued pig. To his right was fried chicken, flanked by lofty corn muffins. And on the left was a plate heaped with steaming, fluffy biscuits.

"Help yo'self," Liza was inviting, teeth showing. "Theah's plenty moah."

Mose was reaching for the platter, eyes on the biscuits, when Big Jim Blakely himself appeared, eyes flashing

"You black scamp!" he roared. "What d'you mean eating up my dinner!" He grasped Mose by the shoulder, started toward the door.

"Hones', Mist' Blakely," Mose protested. "I didn' know I wuz in yore house. Hones', I didn'—"

The dining-room faded. Blakely disappeared. And there was Ephram staring down, face puzzled. "Whut you dreamin' of, man? Rouse yoreself. It's goin'-away time."

Mose sat up reluctantly, licked his lips. "If you'd waited a half-hour longer, Brothuh Ephram," he mourned, "I'd 'a' been the most fed-up man in Louisville. Does we eat soon?" he asked hopefully. "Dreams shore whet yore appetite."

A stranger lounged in the alley, a young negro, his dapper clothing a bit wilted. Now and then he would glance furtively up and down the narrow passage. He was introduced to Mose as Brother Wade, the distressed lodge member headed for Shelbyville. Breakfast over, there was little time wasted in preliminaries. Ephram was nervous and anxious to begin the trip. As Mose lashed Cephas between the shafts, inspecting the conglomerate harness, his host and Brother Wade hastened into the house and began to lug out sundry boxes. Upon their eighth trip Mose surveyed the growing cargo which threatened to engulf the flimsy vehicle.

"I clar, Brothuh Ephram," he protested, "we got an awful load."

"Jus' rest easy," Ephram advised. "I kin put yore racehawss on top yet. My wagon'll fool you."

Mose shook his head doubtfully. "Hope it don't fool me," he observed.

It was with the same misgivings that he witnessed the finishing touches, his own property going on top of the pile. Ephram brought Shelby Prince outside, lashed him to the rear wagon gate, then climbed to the seat, inviting Mose to sit beside him. Brother Wade gave parting instructions:

"Jus' you stick aroun' Shelbyville till I drap off'n the train. Keep yore eye on Mist' Lake."

Ephram nodded. "Get up, Cephas!" he shouted.

Cephas groaned, turned and appraised his load, then strained against the collar. The wabbly wheels began to turn.

A half-hour later Mose aroused from deep study. "Who's Mist' Lake?" he inquired politely.

"He's the man—the sheriff," Ephram explained briefly.

BLAKELY had company when he returned from the East; John Worsham had never visited Kentucky before, and so it was with satisfaction that Blakely timed his arrival at daylight; he wished to show his guest the Bluegrass country at its best. Judge Roberts had joined them, and the trio, a bit fatigued, alighted from the train just as the sun came up over a chain of brown-foliaged hills. Autumnal weather again prevailed, with hardly more than a touch of frost. A mellow haze obscured sight of distant farms and timber-crowned hills. From the south drifted the yelping chorus of a pack of hounds on the trail of an active rabbit. Blue smoke wisps curled upward from the chimneys of tenant houses dotting Pleasant Vale, indicating breakfast hour. The hands were already feeding at the red-walled stables, voices raised in song and laughter. There prevailed an atmosphere of peace and contentment that was transmitted to Blakely as he stepped from his machine.

"How long before breakfast?" he inquired of the boy emerging from the house.

"Liza said in a half-hour."

"Let's walk over to the two-year-old stable," Blakely suggested to his companions. "Never saw a finer morning."

Judge Roberts gazed out across the misty valley which swept upward to the Blakely residence. "Fine morning—and no better place in the world to view it from," he observed. "How about it, Worsham?" he asked, turning to the Easterner, who betrayed loss of sleep.

"First sunrise I've seen in five years," Worsham admitted, grinning.

"That's the way with some of you fellows," Blakely grumbled. "Have to drag you halfway across these United States to make you see the sun come up. Now this two-year-old Blue Bird I've been telling you about, is over here." He led the way to the newest building at the farther end of the stable quadrangle. "Keep four of the youngsters and Mammy Lou—she's the best four-legged chaperon I know of," he explained, opening the door. They paused a moment, adjusting their vision to the darkened interior.

"How many in here?" Judge Roberts asked sharply.

"Five—counting Mammy Lou," Blakely answered. "Why?"

"I'm going to see a specialist," Judge Roberts announced. "I see six horses."

"So do I," Worsham added, yawning.

Blakely stared with an expression akin to horror. In a farther stall was something with a body, four legs and a blazed face. Furthermore, it was not a phantom horse; it was consuming the contents of a feed box with considerable energy. A rush of queer noises seemed to clash within Blakely's throat. The unbelievable invasion of his sacred two-year-old stable had taken place; here was concrete evidence.

"Looks like it might be that Shelby Prince horse I sold Mose Perkins up at Churchill Downs," Judge Roberts observed softly.

"Shelby Prince," Worsham repeated. "Name sounds familiar."

Blakely recovered speech with violent suddenness. "You Mose!" he thundered. Shelby Prince and four two-year-olds looked up, startled. Mammy Lou, who had no halter, ceased eating and walked down the stall passageway. Worsham transferred interest from Blakely and Shelby Prince to the inspecting round of the equine chaperon.

"Call somebody, Mist' Blakely?" inquired a young negro at the door.

"I did," Blakely snapped, "—Mose Perkins. Get that black rascal up here on the jump." He turned to his guests. "That good-for-nothing sponger!" he stormed. "I'm going to run him off the farm for good. Told him not to bring that old cripple down here. And here he's got nerve enough to put him in the same stable with Blue Bird. I'll fix him—"

Judge Roberts smiled. "Maybe Mose put him in here temporarily. He isn't capable of looking out for himself entirely. Anyway, I don't think I'd run the old darky away. He's been with you a long time. Seems like I can still see you and Mose the day Romulus won the Proctor Knott. You could have hugged Mose that day. He nursed the horse through a bad sick spell. No, he's got a high rating on the credit side of the ledger."

"Well, I'm pensioning him," Blakely retorted. "And he's just put a big item on the debit side. That scalawag will make me the laughing stock of the country. What will people say when they hear about this?"

"Laugh, just as you will when you get over your grouch," Judge Roberts answered. "Most everybody knows about Mose and the horse, anyway."

"I don't," Worsham put in.

"I'll tell you at breakfast," Judge Roberts returned, gently propelling Blakely toward the door.

From underneath a hayrack Mose Perkins emerged, brushing cobwebs from clothing and face. Making certain that the white men had gone, he climbed into the stall and faced Shelby Prince.

"Hawss," he said, "keep on eatin'—jus' as much as you lak. We're goin' to stay."

MOSE was accurate about the future of Shelby Prince, but his prophecy overlooked troublesome times ahead for himself. The Blakely party had barely finished breakfast when an extraordinary procession left the highway and headed for Pleasant Vale. Cephas, puffing at his heavy load, which had the supplemental burden of a dejected Ephram and Brother Wade, led the way. Behind, followed an automobile, driven by Sheriff Lake. Beside the broad-faced, clear-eyed officer sat an attenuated figure whose close, beady eyes were reinforced by an upturned, lengthy mustache. His coat was unbuttoned, revealing a silver badge pinned to his vest. An inner pocket contained credentials which certified that the bearer was one Hiram Lewis, prohibition agent.

Cephas and the automobile halted before the Blakely house. The owner, summoned by an excited servant, came to the door.

"I hate to bother you, Jim," the sheriff apologized, alighting from the machine; "but Lewis, the Government man here, insists. It seems that there was a liquor warehouse robbery over at Louisville—some darkies mixed up in it—headed in this direction. Mose and another negro came through Shelbyville this morning, early, with this outfit. Lewis picked up the driver and a young negro who's been loafing around the station. They've got a load of boxes Lewis wants to examine."

"H'm!" Blakely grunted. "Never heard of Mose getting into trouble before. Don't believe he did, either. But he did blow in this morning. I'll send for him."

Mose had been forewarned; every stable employee had contributed information minutes before Blakely had known. When Blakely's message was delivered, he climbed down from a hay loft and approached the machine, totally ignoring the culprits on the wagon.

"Mose, why did you try to smuggle all that whisky over here?" Blakely demanded.

The darky registered pained surprise. "Ain't seen no whisky."

"Know this man?" the sheriff asked, pointing to Ephram and Brother Wade.

"Nossuh," Mose denied; "nevuh saw 'em befoah."

Lewis fidgeted; his mustache fairly bristled with disapproval of such procedure. "They're all mixed up in it," he asserted. "We ought to lock 'em up."

"H'm!" Blakely grunted. "You jail one of my darkies for no reason and I'll make it about the hottest water you ever dropped into."

"We haven't opened those boxes yet." Sheriff Lake spoke up. "Reckon we ought to do that right now, Jim. That would settle the whole business."

Lewis watched his brother officer in disgust. There was a levity in Lake's manner which seemed to imply doubt. The house boy produced a hatchet and Lake pried open the topmost box. Out came a dozen coat-hangers, one electric tailor's goose, two badly wrinkled suits and a carton of flamboyant pasteboard cards announcing the Palace Dry Cleaning and Tailoring Company.

Lewis shifted, then alighted from the machine. He peered into the box. "Nothing incriminating here," Lake announced.

"Gimme that hatchet," Lewis growled. "That's a stall. I'm going to open one of the boxes at the bottom of this load. That's where they've got the stuff hid."

Following up his declaration of intentions, Lewis delved into the plunder and brought forth a small, but heavy carton. The dry agent slid the box to the ground alongside Cephas, worked the edge of his weapon along the top, then pried. The top lifted with a rasping noise that caused Brother Wade to crane his neck apprehensively.

"There's a full demijohn of white mule," Lewis said. "I knew they couldn't fool me." In his eagerness, Lewis slashed at a perverse nail and misjudged. The hatchet crashed through and struck the demijohn. A milk-white mist enveloped the dry agent, who promptly dropped his investigation and sat down. He attempted to cough, to speak, and failed completely in both. His mustache drooped and tears streamed down his cheek. Sheriff Lake leaped forward, sniffed once and whirled.

"It's ammonia," he shouted.

Coincident with Lake's explanation, the humble Cephas came to life—"sprang" might be a better word. Senility took wings; and Ephram's horse, removed from the ordinary ambitions of horsedom by a goodly span of years, underwent a recrudescence—an ammonia resurrection.

AT HIS first frenzied leap, Ephram and Brother Wade came to earth with emphasis. Even as Cehpas gained momentum, there came the sound of bursting harness tugs. In fact Cephas was running away, bounding along like a muscle-bound hare grown abruptly supple. The careening wagon deposited a trail of boxes. At the pasture gate a wheel caught against a gatepost. With a crash the wagon collapsed, leaving Cephas with the shafts and front wheels as an impost. Figures emerged from stable doors to stare in amazement while Cephas proceeded to disappear across a partially deserted meadow, his direction, in a way, the Atlantic seaboard. A wheel shot out to the right, spun crazily and came to rest in a clover patch.

Ephram remained sitting, legs outstretched, mouth open. He wore an expression of wonder and perplexity.

"Cephas nevuh did go an' do that way befoah," he complained. Brother Wade never offered comment; he was rubbing a generous portion of Pleasant Vale farm from his face. Sheriff Lake switched his gaze from the diminishing form of Cephas to a critical inspection of Ephram, then Brother Wade, at last settling upon Lewis. The dry agent held a handkerchief against his eyes, the remainder of his face registering the same amazement as that of the colored victims.

Sheriff Lake began to laugh, not merely heartily, but with abandon. Hands on knees, he let out yelps that were heard beyond the stable quadrangle. Blakely joined in, first with a series of preliminary rumbles, then thunderous guffaws that reached the ears of Judge Roberts and Worsham, out at the half-mile track behind the stables. Ephram and Brother Wade grinned sheepishly. Only Mose and Lewis remained grave. The dry agent saw no cause for amusement. Mose was still absorbed in the marvel of Cephas's rejuvenation.

"If that hawss kin make a mile in nothin' flat—an' he's fo'teen if he's a day," Mose reasoned, "Shelby Prince kin jus' naturally outrun his shadow when he gits straightened out again."

Sheriff Lake sobered. "Whose junk was that, anyway?" he demanded.

Brother Wade halted his cleansing efforts. "It wuz mine," he explained, "—the Palace Dry Cleanin' Company. I'm movin' 'cause my ex-wife's gone an' tried to 'tach my goods. I rose an' flew from Louisville. Aimed to staht up again over to Shelbyville. Brother Ephram heah—"

"I'm his lodge brothuh," Ephram cut in, "—jus' helpin'. Me an' Brothuh Mose—"

"He moved my plunder down—an' my racehawss," Mose interrupted. He gazed at the wreckage in Cephas's wake. "Now I'm plumb ruint," he added.

"Well, you satisfied?" the sheriff inquired of Lewis.

"Yes, let 'em go," Lewis growled, handkerchief still to his left eye. "Let's go back to town and see a doctor."

Lake helped the dry agent to his feet, then turned to Ephram. "Here's five dollars," he said. "As a show, it was worth the price."

Blakely turned back toward the porch. "Come around again, Lake," he invited, "especially when you intend to stage another performance."

Lake never spoke. But over Lewis's head he winked solemnly, then started the automobile.

Blakely surveyed the trio of negroes. "Now you've made a fine mess of things," he observed. "Going to pay for that outfit, Mose?"

"I'm plumb busted," Mose admitted.

"Wagon didn't cost but twelve dollars," Ephram spoke up. He gazed wistfully in the direction of the departed Cephas. "It's the hawss I wants back. Wonder—" He glanced at Mose. "Wonder if we put Shelby Prince over this yere dimmijohn, could he overtake Cephas?"

Judge Roberts came around a stable building. "Oh, Jim!" he called. "One of the boys headed off that streak of lightning down in the lower pasture."

Ephram and Brother Wade started off on a run, followed by Mose.

"What's happened, anyway?" Judge Roberts asked a minute later, as he and Worsham hurried up.

"An object lesson in fraternal love," answered the master of Pleasant Vale farm.

THE upshot of it all was that Ephram got a new wagon, Brother Wade extra financial support in his transferred enterprise and Shelby Prince a stall—not with the sacred two-year-olds—protected from winter winds and an endless supply of provender. Big Jim Blakely never did things by halves; and Judge Roberts, as well as Worsham, insisted upon contributing to the fund which wiped out the disaster to the three colored worthies. Regarding Shelby Prince, his three months in winter quarters were not worthy of recording. Mose attended him, to the exclusion of all other thoroughbreds at Pleasant Vale. He massaged, applied vile-smelling lotions and did yeoman service, especially during the damp, rainy days preceding spring. If he could get Shelby Prince through those rheumatic weeks, he would be satisfied.

Blakely, as usual, went away, visiting in the East, then down to the winter tracks, where he campaigned with a small string. He left orders for the older thoroughbreds to be taken out on the farm track during March. And all of them were exercised but Shelby Prince. Mose, to the disgust of other stablemen, was carrying out his private campaign. Outside of leading the veteran about the quadrangle, he left him in his stall.

But the youngsters were the chief attraction now. Exercise boys began to take them out for sharp gallops at three-eighths of a mile. The two-year-olds were to face the barrier first at Lexington; and the spring meeting was a matter of weeks now.

Mose would sit upon the fence, eyes upon riders more than mounts. One coal-black exercise boy in particular—Jim Scruggs—held his attention. Jim was a newcomer, close-mouthed and earnest in his ambition to become a jockey. It was late in March, with Blakely's return announced the coming Saturday, when Mose beckoned to Scruggs. The boy led his horse over to the stable and returned.

"You wants to wear silks instead of a sweater?" Mose inquired.

"Shore do," Scruggs replied.

"I got five dollars," Mose announced, "—five bones to spend for a blouse. An' I got a hunch Jedge Roberts won't say no when I asks him to give you a prentice license. Does you ride Shelby Prince at the Downs this spring?"

"Yassuh—any time—any place."

The remainder of their conversation was confidential, so personal that it was held down in the lower pasture. It ended when Mose handed over the five-dollar bill with specific instructions as to the variety of colors involved in the making of a jockey's blouse. "All I wants," he concluded, "is fo' my coluhs to be eyeball jolters."

When Blakely returned Saturday, Mose asked for a check. The amount exceeded the purchase price of Shelby Prince. But this time Mose did not have to make explanation. Instead, his employer offered to provide for transporting the horse to Churchill Downs or Lexington. "I don't think you'll ever get Shelby Prince in the money," he observed; "but you might get some newcomer to claim him. He's filled out, and his hair's glossy. You might sell him at a profit at that."

"Yassuh," Mose agreed. "Hawss shore do look better'n when I bought 'im. Moves aroun' right peart, too."

The following Saturday saw Blakely's outfit entraining for Lexington; some of the older horses had already been sent by truck. While checking up his string, Blakely realized Shelby Prince wasn't in the lot; neither was Mose. Nobody remembered exactly, but one boy ventured the information that a negro had driven a truck out at daylight. He had seen Mose and Jim Scruggs load Shelby Prince, and the machine start toward Louisville.

"No fool like an old fool," Blakely observed, a bit annoyed.

STEVE REDMON, when the name of Shelby Prince appeared among the entries for the sixth race the second week of the spring meeting at Churchill Downs, was puzzled. Redmon worked in the track secretary's office; and it was his business to have accurate knowledge concerning thoroughbreds racing at the course. He examined the envelope accompanying. "Money's O.K., but what in the world is Mose Perkins doing, entering a horse tomorrow? Thought he worked for Jim Blakely." He entered the adjoining office, where Harry Leonard, track handicapper, sat upon his desk, puffing away at a pipe and gazing out of the window.

"Say, Harry!" Redmon called. "Blakely's old darky, Mose Perkins, has entered a horse called Shelby Prince in the sixth tomorrow."

Leonard knocked the ashes from his pipe. "Well?"

"That's what I want to know," Redmon countered. "Is it his horse?"

Leonard grinned. "Thought everybody knew about the Nicky White sale last year. Sure it's all right. Mose has been keeping the old skate in a private stable and exercising him over at Douglas Park. Got a little negro—apprentice name of Scruggs—in the saddle. Did he put up entry fees?"

"Yes," Redmon admitted. "But he sent in the horse as belonging to the X-H-B stables, whatever that is."

"You can't turn Mose down then," Leonard observed. "He hasn't got a chance anyway—horse too old. Clockers say he lumbers around Douglas course like an old cow. Guess X-H-B is O.K., too."

The next day saw an average mid-week racing crowd at Churchill Downs. It was an ordinary program, embracing as its major thrill a twenty-five-hundred-dollar purse for the fifth race. That event had just passed into history and a trace of dust still overhung track and infield. Beneath the stands, pari-mutuel operators were swiftly inserting the names of entries for the sixth race, a claiming affair, into machine slots. Waiting lines began to grow before the two-dollar booths. The first buyer called for a ticket on Cortez, the Florella Stable entry. Cortez was a six-year-old that had nearly made the handicap class in his younger years; he was certain to be favorite, holding the rail position and considered more than likely to win the mile-and-eighth race despite an impost of a hundred and thirty pounds. There was only one drawback. Cortez was a trifle temperamental; and it was his first time to face the barrier with such heavy weight. Delegate, an erratic plater, fourth in position, and White Lock, fifth, were second and third choices, betters in this race being guided chiefly by form chart ratings.

Because there was plenty of room on the promenade before the stands, the appearance of Mose Perkins created a mild sensation. Arrayed in frock coat, brown derby and wearing tan shoes that were about the tanniest tan leather could stand, the darky's lordly stroll to the track rail distracted attention from the post parade which had just begun. Mose had but one regret; his money ran out just before he had eyed a gaudy walking cane in the little Market Street store where he had invested in the new raiment. The sixth race entries came closer and Mose ceased to command attention. But there was glory even in that, for it was Shelby Prince—rather the jockey—that caused even the bored bandmaster in the clubhouse to stare.

Astride the blazed-face gelding rode an ebony-hued jockey whose blouse bore an orange and scarlet device upon a field of purple. It was as two sunbursts battling for prominence, neither the victor. A noisy blue sash contributed to the general scheme. Shelby Prince was seventh in line; therefore he furnished a delayed anticlimax. Jim Scruggs, from the rear, displayed another marvelous design—a series of yellow rings upon black, after the manner of a rifle target. Altogether, the Number Seven horse was the most conspicuous of that procession.

FATE plays queer pranks in ball games, love affairs and horse races. Even Mose, profound in his belief that Shelby Prince would be in the money, could not realize that Cortez was boiling over with indignation because he felt his heavy impost. And for that, Billy McCrea, riding Delegate, could not know that his mount had suddenly developed a hatred toward White Lock, whom Johnny Chandler, cleverest rider at the Downs, was astride.

Mose clutched two pasteboard tickets, both costing five dollars, on Shelby Prince to win. One was for Jim Scruggs. The mile-and-eighth start was before the stands and not far from Mose. Delegate started things when he aimed a sly kick at White Lock and struck an assistant. For that, McCrea received a bawling out and was removed to the outside. Cortez remained stiff, ears drawn back.

There came a click, a sweeping upward of the webbing. From the stands, that universal call, "They're off," died into a surprised "Ah-h-h!"

Cortez was standing stiff-legged beneath the webbing, his jockey rocking to and fro in the saddle, but with no results. Cortez had eliminated himself in protest at the heavy weight given by the handicapper.

A thousand pairs of eyes shifted to the lower turn where the field began to shuffle for the back-stretch battle. Delegate was pounding along, flanks barely ahead of White Lock. Johnny Chandler sought to bring White Lock abreast; he leaned forward, pulled to the right and brought down his whip. To his amazement, White Lock leaped directly ahead and into Delegate. Stretching his neck, he nipped at Delegate's flanks. Startled, Delegate lashed out with both hind legs.

Billy McCrea turned two somersaults and landed on his feet, unhurt. Johnny Chandler was more unlucky; White Lock fell upon him. There was the matter of a broken jaw and a sprained wrist for hospital surgeons to worry about fifteen minutes later.

In those breathless seconds, the stands forgot the race, gazing spellbound at the dust cloud which obscured horses and riders sprawled on the track. A nasty spill, even in flat racing, is the one thing that will remove interest from a race. It was seconds before the majority of ticket-holders forgot racing stable hands, the speeding ambulance and galloping mounted policeman, to realize that the three favorites were eliminated.

Within that time, something had leaped forward, avoiding the careening field, to gain the rail and a twenty-length lead. That something bore the numeral seven—Shelby Prince—of the X-H-B stables.

Before the spill, Shelby Prince had been last. No one, less than Jim Scruggs, really understood how the aged gelding had cleared the tangle of horses and jockeys to gain the rail. Perhaps it was that mythical racing sense, which is nothing more than years of experience, that turned the trick. Anyhow, Shelby Prince was out four full seconds ahead, reckoning four lengths to the second, and that was equivalent to victory, at least against selling platers.

The stands gazed silently at the leaping, blazed-face gelding with the gaily caparisoned rider. Mose, face ashy, forgot to call upon Shelby Prince, so amazed was he at this outpouring of luck from the racing gods.

But Scruggs, the little colored apprentice who was to make history by winning his first race, was not at all concerned about winning. Shelby Prince refused to slow up his rather swift pace. The rider had a vision of another stumble, a disaster before the judges' pagoda. He gave the lines another wrap. "Hawss," he entreated, "you done won—don't go so fas'. Umph! Lawdy! We're passin' the stan's now. Slow up, hawss! Yo're goin' to kill me. There's the judges' stan'. Ump! Slow up, hawss—slow up! Lawdy!"

But not until he was opposite the mile chute, a quarter of a mile away, did Shelby Prince feel it safe to put on the brakes. He wheeled suddenly, nearly upsetting Scruggs, and proceeded to canter back.

MOSE, his dignity recovered, took possession of Shelby Prince, loftily ignoring the respectful gaze of Owl Head Jackson and others who had lined up, that autumn morning, to laugh at his purchase. Chief interest among those along the track rail was centered upon the shirt-sleeved man approaching the sign across the way where two-dollar pari-mutuel prices were posted. Jim Scruggs popped out from the weighing room, saddle on arm. He heard a prolonged roar from the crowd, glanced toward the board where the shirt-sleeved man was posting figures. Shelby Prince paid one hundred and two dollars to win.

"Boy," Mose announced, "I holds a five-dollar ticket for you—likewise one for myself."

Blakely and Judge Roberts came down the tiny stairway from the judges' stand.

"Mose," Judge Roberts called, "we've been having a little argument upstairs. Would you mind telling us what X-H-B stands for?"

Mose gazed up the track. Jim Scruggs was walking ahead of Shelby Prince, the latter led by an obliging friend. For a time the darky was silent. He was thinking of Sister Arabella, who would see only honor and prestige in accepting him as a roomer. He saw himself elevated to high position in the Brotherhood of the Purple Robe. He saw a potential partnership with Ephram, the Samaritan. Turning to Judge Roberts, not with the humble mien of Mose Perkins, stable hand, but with the proud glance of a Kaffir chieftain, he spoke.

"You-all said Shelby Prince was a has-been. Well, I knowed bettuh—tha's all. He's a ex-has-been now. Tha's it—X-H-B. It stan's for ex-has-been."

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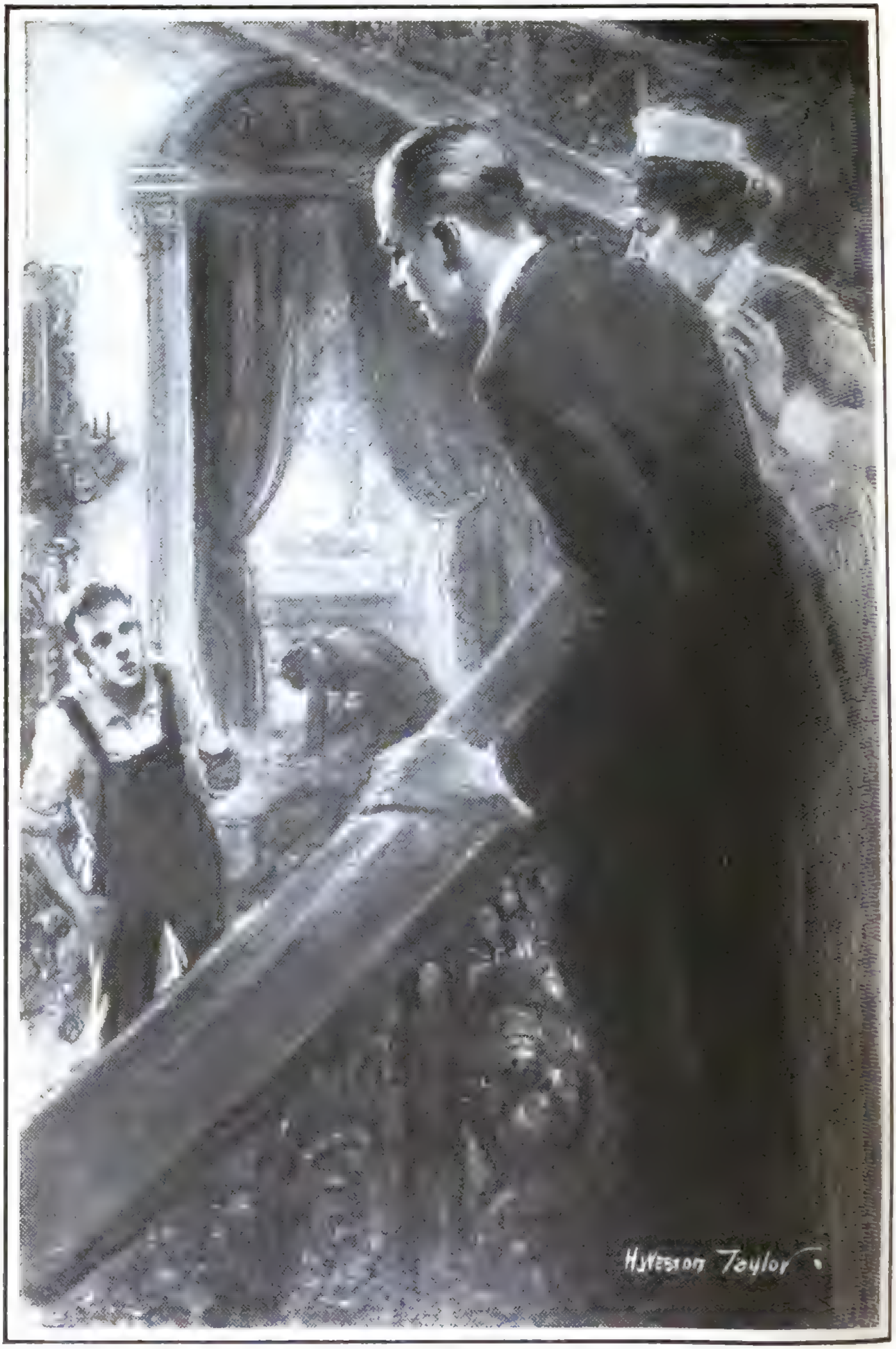

H. Weston Taylor

"Now, Marvin," I called. "Come down and we'll finish our argument."
And then—blackness.

A Novel Complete in This Issue

The King's Table

The Return of a Prodigal, the Villainy of a Scheming Cousin and the Gathering of the Birds of Prey at the Death of the Town's Rich Man—These Elements Used with New Variations in a Story of Fine Suspense

By Hugh Randolph

Illustrations by H. Weston Taylor

WHEN you have knocked about the world as much as I have you get, after a time, to feel differently about coincidence, and to understand that these queer things that happen are probably arranged, in some fashion. I went to Severn because I heard a man at the club mention Jake Sleezby's name and then that of my uncle, Peter Huntley.

I hadn't been in New York long; I expected to be there only a few days more, because I was thinking very seriously of taking up a proposition that would make Montevideo my abiding place for the next few years. And it just happened that I heard this man talking about Jake Sleezby and his Russian concession, and of his plans for financing it—which included dealings with an eccentric millionaire in Severn called Peter Huntley.

Now, I knew a good deal more about Jake Sleezby than he would care to have me repeat. And while my Uncle Peter had been neither eccentric nor a millionaire the last time I had seen him, I knew that he was probably comfortably off, at least—and that he wouldn't continue to be even that if he had any dealings with Jake. One didn't.

It seemed to be up to me. Going back to Severn wasn't exactly what I wanted to do. When I went away, eleven years before—at the ripe age of seventeen or thereabouts—I had very definite ideas about my return. It was to be triumphant. I was to have become both rich and famous. Well, I'd never gone back. It isn't so easy to go back, sometimes, as it seems.

I can make a very short tale out of what might be a very long one, and get out of the way, here and now, some things you have to know before you can understand what comes later.

I wasn't born in Severn, although my parents came from there, but away out West. My mother died when I was born; my father was killed a few months later. So my mother's brother, Peter Huntley, came and got me, and took me home.

He was the son of old Colonel John Huntley, one of the great men of Severn, and certainly the leader of its bar, in the days after the Civil War. My mother had married beneath her, in the general view—my father was an engineer, Donald McClay. It hadn't bothered Uncle Peter, but their other sister, my Aunt Julia—who later married Hamilton Cross, the banker—took it very hard. I know she never liked me; never regarded me as quite the social equal of her own son, Marvin.

My Uncle Peter was in partnership with

Joel Huckers when I was growing up. They'd been friends ever since Joel had saved Peter's life when they were both kids, when Peter was drowning—the old colonel never got over that, and made it his business always to take care of Joel. Joel's father was the town drunkard of those days, but a straighter, more sober fellow than old Joel as I remembered him there never was. He was, a good many people used to say, the brains of the firm after Colonel John's death. Peter, though, was a good trial lawyer, and a great business bringer (he had an extraordinary social gift, which Joel lacked altogether).

It seemed to me, as I thought about them, after I'd heard that casual conversation about Jake Sleezby, that they must have made a great team. As I looked back I could see that Joel had been a singularly shrewd business man; a much better one, probably, than Uncle Peter. But Uncle Peter I remembered as the kindliest of men. It wasn't his fault, Heaven knows, that I ran away!

No. Everything had been fine, and I'd had as happy a time as a boy ever did, until, when I was about twelve, Hamilton Cross died and my Aunt Julia came back to Severn to live with Uncle Peter. She didn't like me, and of course, when I grew older, I saw that one reason was that she was looking forward, and wanted Marvin to be Uncle Peter's heir.

MARVIN and I never could get along. He was a pimply, spindly youngster, and I was pretty husky. He was always telling tales on me, and his mother did all she could to turn Uncle Peter against me. And he rather cut me out with Alice Ford, too. Alice lived next door, and was my first sweetheart. Life wasn't the same at all after Marvin came. And I remember that it was about then that people began talking about how rich Uncle Peter and Joel Huckers were getting—thanks, it was said, to some remarkably clever investments made by Joel.

I stood it at home until my last year at high school. Then I had a grand row with Marvin, one day, when we were alone in the law office, and after I'd licked him I rubbed ink and mucilage into his hair. I was in the wrong, I guess; anyway, I knew it would be made to seem so. So I ran away. And I hadn't thought much about Severn, or the people there, until I heard Jake Sleezby's name.

But it didn't take me long to decide that it was my cue to return—even if I wasn't going to reproduce, exactly, the picture of my return as I had dreamed it. Writing wouldn't do: I had to see Uncle Peter and make him understand the truth—if I could. If I couldn't I rather thought I could protect him, anyway—if I saw Jake. Jake knew what I had on him.

So I caught the next night's train, and got off at Severn the following afternoon. It amused me, and rather pleased me, too, to see Sleezby get off the same train, although he didn't seem so pleased when he saw me. But I knew I was in time, anyway, and I felt quite cheerful as I telephoned home from the station. The butler, or whoever answered, knew nothing about me, but finally took it in, and agreed to send for my bags. I wanted to walk; I felt like having a look at the town. I didn't intend to stay long. I had to see Uncle Peter, and I wanted to see Joel Huckers and Alice Ford.

I felt quite sentimental about Alice, of course. One does. She was probably married and wouldn't remember me, I thought; and I enjoyed feeling sorry for myself, a wanderer on the face of the earth. Only—she wasn't married, yet, and she remembered me perfectly—as I found out ten minutes later, when she pulled up beside me in a neat little runabout she was driving and called my name!

She'd grown up into a beauty, too. I couldn't take my eyes off her. She made me get in, and took all sorts of chances in the Windsor Street traffic while we talked. She remembered all right—even to my calling her up, the night I went away, and telling her, and promising to come back, when I was rich, and asking her if she'd wait for me!

"You never waited to hear what I'd say!" she said. "And you never came back to find out if I did wait!"

I looked at her left hand, and she laughed.

"I'm surprised you remember!" I said. "You must have had ever so many proposals—"

"Twenty!" she said. "But a girl doesn't forget her first, Grant—ever!"

"And you said no to the whole twenty?"

"Why, no, Grant! I didn't have a chance

to say yes or no the first time. And I haven't said what my answer was to the last."

I was curiously upset.

"I suppose that means you're engaged, then?" I said. She didn't answer. I waited a minute. "To—Number Twenty?"

"Oh, Number Twenty!" she said. "He's awfully stubborn, Grant. He won't take no for an answer, I'm sure—"

Something about the phrase made me jump. I remembered a boy who wouldn't ever take no for an answer.

"Alice—it's not Marvin?"

She blushed—actually.

"Oh, Lord—Marvin!" I said. "Alice—you couldn't!"

"Well"—her eyes were mischievous—"what else can I do? Is my first proposal still open to me, Grant?"

I knew she was joking, and it hurt. And I wasn't going to let her see that. So I just laughed. And she did, too, and began to tell me the news of Severn. Uncle Peter was a millionaire, all right, it seemed: a regular magnate. I had to laugh at that; it didn't seem to fit, somehow. I asked if Joel Huckers hadn't had a lot to do with his success.

"I've heard father say Mr. Huckers was responsible for his earlier success. But then he failed—"

"Joel Huckers failed!" I cried in amazement.

"Why, yes! Hadn't you heard? It was ever so long ago. It must have been soon after you went away."

That fairly floored me. Uncle Peter had always been easy-going, affable and unbusinesslike, while Joel Huckers was keen, resourceful and reliant.

"Well, it just shows," I said after a moment, "you can never tell what will happen. Good old Joel!"

"GOOD old Joel!" repeated Alice, with surprise. "There's nothing good about that old—crab. Last year I was out on a drive for hospital funds and he was down on my list. He nearly bit my head off. In fact, he was the only man I called on who didn't give a cent."

"Oh, come now, Alice!" I protested. "I'm not going to believe all that. He used to growl a bit but he had the biggest heart in the whole wide world."

"I don't know anything about his past," she persisted. "Right now he's the most disliked man in Severn. After he failed he started to practise law again by himself but he doesn't seem to do very well. People think he's rather shady in his methods. Perhaps his troubles soured him. It certainly looks that way to me."

I hesitated a little over my next question.

"Is there any enmity between Joel and my uncle?"

"On the contrary, they're the best of friends," she answered. "Mr. Huckers goes to see him every day. They say Mr. Huntley pays him an allowance."

"That's like Uncle Peter," I said. "But it wasn't like him to let it be known."

"Marvin told me."

"Of course!" I exclaimed savagely. "How generally has it got around?"

"I'm afraid every one knows about it now."

"Trust Marvin and Aunt Julia for that!"

Alice turned on me in wide-eyed surprise. "Haven't you heard about that, even? Why, your aunt died over a year ago."

I have my full share of faults but I have never felt that hypocrisy was one of them. I made no effort to simulate grief at this announcement. As a matter of fact, I heard it with a sense almost of relief. I had certainly dreaded coming face to face again with my formidable aunt.

"I've gained the impression somehow that my relations live in considerable style nowadays," I said after a pause.

Alice nodded. "Oh, quite! As father elegantly puts it, they throw on a lot of dog. Marvin is—well, a stickler for form."

That was rather to be expected. "Crown Prince stuff, eh? I suppose I'll have to be on my best behavior then. The rôle of the poor relation is rather a delicate one, with certain fine shadings: polite and respectful but dignified. Have they a big place?"

"Wait until you see it!" cried Alice. "Why, Huntley Court is the show place of the state!"

"Huntley Court!" I groaned. "I'll stake everything I possess it wasn't Uncle Peter thought that name up. Is it a French château affair, with turrets and towers and gable windows under the leads and all kinds of doodads?" Alice nodded in affirmation. "Then Aunt Julia won out. My uncle used to talk of the time when he would build a fine Colonial house, but Aunt Julia had different ideas."

"You haven't told me anything about yourself yet," Alice said, "or why you came back. Being a presumptuous person, I'm assuming it was to see me."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I had to come just now to see Uncle Peter on a matter of business," I explained.

She shook her head at me hopelessly. "You don't know the rules, Grant. But then, you have never told anything but the truth and the whole truth all your life. None of the polite evasions or the nice little white lies for upright young Mr. McClay! Well"—doubtfully—"that sort of thing would probably be very comforting in a husband. But it doesn't help much when you're a suitor. But perhaps I'm taking too much for granted. Are you a suitor, Grant?"

I didn't know just what to say to that and, while I fumbled around for a reply, Alice went on.

"Well, let it go. You never could be made to flirt, anyway. Never mind me, Grant. You keep right along as you're going now and you'll make a fine husband some day for some nice, quiet, serious-minded girl." Then, in a relenting tone: "And she'll be a lucky girl, too."

We were back in town now and the streets began to wear a familiar look. I asked Alice to drop me at Joel Huckers's office and we drew up before an old three-story office building on a side street. One of the ground-floor windows displayed a dusty, hand-lettered cardboard sign:

JOEL HUCKERS, ATTORNEY.

Alice laid a detaining hand on my arm as I prepared to get out.

"It's rather a coincidence, Grant, but I'm giving a party tonight," she said. "You'll come, of course."

"Of course I will."

She said nothing for a moment. Then: "If you cared to dance with the hostess I suppose it might be arranged."

I thanked her and was turning to go in when she called me back. She was reaching for the gear shift and spoke quite casually. "It's probably of no interest to you, but I just wanted to tell you—I'm rather afraid it will be necessary to give—Number Twenty—a definite answer tonight."

THE interior of the law office was quite dark. I nearly upset a chair before my eyes became sufficiently familiar with the gloom to make out a figure behind a desk in the farthest corner.

"Well?"

Age had given a querulous edge to the old man's voice and I didn't recognize it at once. Likewise when the figure in the corner became clearer I was surprised and depressed with a sense of unfamiliarity. Joel Huckers had been tall and strongly built, with a face like roughhewn granite. I saw now a stoop-shouldered and almost frail old man with a tousled mop of white hair—an old man whose hands trembled as they clutched at the arms of his creaky chair.

"Well?" he repeated.

I stepped forward until I stood over the cheap pine desk.

"If you had any light here, sir, it perhaps wouldn't be necessary for me to make an explanation," I said.

" 'The voice is the voice of Jacob,' " quoted the old man. "I don't need the light to recognize you when you speak, Grant McClay." He raised himself out of his chair with a nervous hitch of the arms and shook hands. "Sit down. Before we talk I want to take a good look at you. You began life badly, young man, running away from your uncle's home. A bad start. I want to see if you've lived up to the meager promise of your headstrong and rather silly youth."

I did not mind the words, for Joel's bark had always been proverbial. So I said nothing while he stared intently at me in the uncertain light of the dusk-darkened room. Finally, he bobbed his head emphatically two or three times.

"Like the red rider who stood among the myrtle trees," he affirmed, "you've been called to walk to and fro through the earth. I can see that in you. And it's a disappointment. I had hoped—" He broke off a moment and let his glance brood on the desk before him. Then he looked up and asked me, sharply: "Ten years! Have you been footloose all that time?"

"Pretty much," I answered, with a nod. "I knocked around the first few years and then managed to work my way through an engineering school. I had a year overseas—none of the hero stuff, though. I was building railroads a safe two miles back. Since then I've been handling jobs wherever I can find them. South America, China, Borneo—I've been everywhere."

Joel nodded. He had sunk back into his chair and looked quite feeble and old.

"And has it been profitable?" he asked. "That, I suppose, is the first question every one asks you."

I hesitated. "Fortunes are made and lost in my line," I answered. "One man I know has cleaned up a couple of millions in the last few years. But mostly, of course, we're rolling stones."

"And proving the proverb? Well, I can forgive that. Somehow the spectacle of a young man gathering moss has never seemed to me entirely inspiring."

"I can't begin to tell you," I said, feeling my way cautiously, "how sorry I was to learn today that you had—suffered business reverses. I could hardly credit it."

The old man did not reply at once. He stared out of the window at the back walls of a row of cluttered stores. Finally, he said in a low tone: "Behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness and smote the four corners of my house. And the Sabeans and the Chaldeans fell upon me. And now you find me, sitting like Job, among the ashes."

His voice had a sort of singsong when he fell into this trick of biblical semi-quotation. Ordinarily he had a crisp, incisive way of speaking. I soon found that he alternated thus back and forth in the course of every conversation. A curious trait: I began to wonder if his financial troubles had partly upset his balance. Joel had always been a sincerely religious man but this ready flow of Scripture was something distinctly new. I noticed for the first time that a large Bible lay on the desk before him with a pair of spectacles folded on the opened page.

HE WENT on, in his normal tone. "I suppose it was one of the first things you heard—that old Joel Huckers had gone smash. It was a great thing for Severn when it occurred. I became an object lesson for my fellow citizens. They have drawn many morals from the rise and fall of the town drunkard's son. My case has been discussed at full length with you, no doubt?"

I shook my head.

"Then you have just arrived," he affirmed. "No one could be in Severn more than a few hours without hearing all about me. The Bildads and the Zophars stopped coming to see me years ago and I'm the town apostate now. If you want to be popular here you mustn't report this visit."

I was becoming convinced that there was something back of all this. It was difficult to imagine any circumstance or situation which could completely rob Joel Huckers of the esteem of his fellows.

"I don't expect to stay here long," I declared; "but I'm going to find time to tell the people of this town what I think of the way they're treating you. You always were the best man in Severn. I'll take my chance that you are still!"

Joel smiled bleakly. "Prophets of evil have never found friends," he said. "I have constituted myself a prophet in Severn. And, like Micaiah the son of Imlah, I do not prophesy good concerning them but evil. I stand upon Mount Ebal to curse; and I point out the meannesses and faults of my townspeople."

Conversation dropped for the moment. The old man seemed content to settle back in his chair without further words. I took advantage of the pause to make a quick survey of the office. It was not large and was quite sparsely furnished with one desk and a few cheap chairs. The floor was bare of any rug and the walls were empty save for an old print of Abraham Lincoln and a dusty calendar. In one corner stood a very ancient and battered bookcase, topped by a dust-ingrained bust of Charles Dickens. And yet, despite its cheapness, the room possessed a certain dignity.

It was Joel who broke the silence. He spoke of my uncle and his face softened and his eyes actually beamed.

"You'll find him changed, my boy," he said. "He has lived a fine life. 'The heart of Asa was perfect all his days.' But even the best among us have to grow old. Poor Peter is getting almost feeble. There's no use in blinking facts, he's getting feeble. I noticed it particularly when I went to see him this morning."

"Do you think he'll be glad to see me?" I asked.

"He will, indeed. He was speaking of you this morning."

"And will Marvin?"

The old man repeated my cousin's name. His tone, I thought, was a curious one. I couldn't quite define it. Then he squared around in his chair and his whole personality seemed to change. He became more like the Joel Huckers I remembered—keen, incisive and businesslike.

"It's the matter of your inheritance that brings you back, I suppose," he said. "We've often wondered why we never heard from you on that score. It looked—well, ominous. When a man leaves a matter of ten thousand or so unclaimed it seems reasonable to assume that he has been translated to a less material sphere. We had almost given you up."

WHEN my grandfather died a share of his estate had gone to my mother. By the time the legacy should have reached me it had dwindled considerably. As my guardian, Uncle Peter had handled the funds and I had never sought an accounting. An entirely illogical streak of pride had held me back. Several times, when pressed for money, I had been on the point of writing to him. Somehow I had always felt, however, that when I renewed the connection with my family I did not want it to be on the score of financial necessity. The money in the meantime was safe, and I never needed it badly enough to ask for it.

"I intend to look into it before I return," I said. "Uncle Peter seems to have grown pretty prosperous, so I may find it has grown in my absence."

"Please don't speak to him about it yet," urged Joel, seriously. "His health worries me and I don't think it would be wise to bother him with business matters. As it happens, I'm in a position to give you all the information."

"There's no hurry about it, of course. I've waited eleven years and my patience is good for a little longer."

He nodded approvingly.

"Are you free at present?" he asked.

"Well, in a sense," I said, with some hesitation.

He hesitated.

"Grant," he said finally, "certain strange events are in prospect. We may need you here—soon and badly. Will you stay for a time?"

It did not take me long to make up my mind. "I'll stay!" I said earnestly.

"I am not at liberty to explain what is in my mind," said Joel, slowly. "I can tell you only that I do not like certain things. Absalom Betters—you remember him?—knows what I know, and agrees with me."

"Ab Betters? He used to be a clerk in the office. We called him Pug—"

"He's president of the Huntley Trust Company now—and one of the ablest men in town. In case of—in case of need, see him, consult with him, depend upon him."

"You can't tell me anything?"

"Not—much." Joel hesitated. "This, perhaps. Your uncle has practically agreed to put a good deal of money into a Russian venture, involving Bolshevik concessions. This would be disastrous, in our judgment."

"But," I cried, astonished, "I think that's why I'm here! Is a man called Jake Sleezby involved?"

He nodded, and listened in surprised interest to what I had to tell him.

"And you came to warn Peter!" he said. "Truly, God moves in a mysterious way! Can you prove what you say about this man?"

"In any court!"

"Good—good! H'm! Marvin—" He hesitated again. "Marvin has been pushing this scheme. You won't be sorry, I'm afraid, to find yourself opposed to him."

"No," I said, rather grimly, "I won't!"

He laughed.

"I must be off," I said, rising. "Dinner will probably be early so we can get away to the party."

The old man looked up with sudden interest.

"Are you going to the Ford dance?" he asked. "If you happen to be going alone, you can do me a very great favor.

"I have a ward," he went on. "She's going, too—the first dance she's ever been invited to attend in Severn—and she's counting on it. Grant, I can't tell you how much she's building on it! In strictest confidence, I asked Peter to use his influence for her—to get her this invitation. Isn't it customary for men to call and escort young ladies to affairs of this kind—and kind of look after them? I thought—"

The directness of his suggestion seemed

to embarrass him and he left the sentence unfinished. I hastened to volunteer my services.

"I shall be very glad to call for your ward," I said. "But I warn you I'm an awkward gawk when it comes to anything of this sort. I dance badly and just naturally turn as dumb as an oyster when I get into evening togs. I get red in the face and my hair stands up on end and I step on girls' toes and drop coffee cups."

"My dear boy," said Joel, his face beaming, "I know you will see to it that my little girl has a wonderful time. I shall be everlastingly grateful to you. Mary is—well, she's the loveliest little daughter of Eve ever sent to gladden the lot of an old sinner. I think you will like her very much. In fact, I'm counting on it."

HUNTLEY COURT came up to all I had heard. I passed through imposing iron gates and up a winding drive. The outline of the house, a high silhouette with brilliant gobs of light, suggested unusual size and even magnificence. A heavy oak door with a really fine iron knocker swung back for me. Standing on the threshold, and bowing me in, was an upstanding individual in an elaborately frogged scarlet coat and knee breeches.

The resplendent apparition escorted me through a lofty hall and up a winding staircase into a corner bedroom with mullioned windows and a fire crackling briskly in a stone fireplace.

"Your clothes are laid out, sir," said the butler, "and your bath turned on."

"When is dinner?" I asked.

"In half an hour, sir."

It took me a full half-hour to get into my clothes and to conquer the shirt studs and dress tie. It's the bane of my existence that I can never achieve an appearance of being well dressed. The finest tailored suit will look baggy and creased after I've worn it two days. It's not the cut of me that's at fault. I am built normally enough in a heavy, big-boned sort of way. It's probably because I don't understand clothes. At any rate I feel bitter envy whenever I see a well-tailored man.

I sought the lower regions of the Huntley domicile with my tie hopelessly askew and my shirt-front bulging.

Uncle Peter was in the library, sunk deep into a leather chair in front of a grate fire. He had aged very perceptibly. His hair was snow-white, which surprised me. But he was unquestionably the handsomest old man I had ever seen, and the most immaculate. His eyes were deep-sunk and tired but there was a benign and pleasant glow in them still. His beard was trimmed neatly. He wore a velvet dinner jacket and there was a razor edge to his trousers.

Although he did not get up from his chair, I could tell he was genuinely glad to see me. We shook hands and his fine old eyes beamed a welcome.

"Back at last, eh, Grant?" he said. His voice, I was sorry to note, was reedy and thin. "Draw your chair up close, my boy, and sit down. I've been thinking about you a lot lately and hoping you would return to see me soon; and here you've come—as unexpectedly as you went away." He laughed and shook his head at me. "You always were full of surprises; one never knew what you would be up to next. Your Aunt Julia— Did you know that we lost her, Grant?"

"I heard it today."

Whatever it was he had intended to tell me about Aunt Julia, I never found out; for, gazing at me wonderingly, he shifted to a remark about my size.

"You're an enormous fellow. You take after your father in that. Donald McClay was a full half-head taller than I, and I was —well, pretty reasonably tall at that. As clumsy as an ox, too, your father. Now your mother— Jennie was as dainty and light as thistledown."

"I had pictures of mother and father," I said eagerly. "They were not lost when you moved, I hope. I'd like to have them now."

"All your things are here," said my uncle, "in your own room. I've always kept a room ready for you, Grant. Didn't you notice any of your old traps or belongings? Or perhaps they put you in one of the guest rooms."

"I think they did."

"Well, we'll see to it that you're moved right away. You're not a guest, my boy, but one of the family. And I want to tell you that I—I have felt very guilty about you all these years. Things were pretty stiff for you, I guess. I seemed to feel it, yet I didn't stand up for you as I should."

I protested warmly that I had never once blamed him for what had occurred and he looked very much relieved. "Well, that's all in the past," he said. "You're back now and we can make up for old mistakes. You can't imagine how glad I am to see you. Things have been getting a bit dull and monotonous here. Marvin is—well, he's a tiresome dog at times. And recently he has taken it into his head that he wants to boss everything. He rushes me into things." His tone suggested a deep-seated but repressed irritation.

At this point dinner was announced and I made the acquaintance of Julius Anchor. He came in to assist Uncle Peter from the library to the dining-room. His ebony countenance was peculiarly puckered and crisscrossed with fine lines; but there was no suggestion of age about his frame. He was straight as a whip and with the shoulders and arms of a heavyweight prize-fighter. His costume was a sort of compromise between regular clothes and the regalia of the footmen—a braided coat and a scarlet vest but plain everyday trousers.

"JULE," piped Uncle Peter as we paraded slowly from the room, "do you know who this is? It's my nephew, Grant—the bad boy who ran away from home."

The body-servant gravely bobbed his head.

"A remarkable fellow, Jule," said my uncle, looking back at me. "He finds out everything. And he's got backbone, too. Stood out against Marvin about knee breeches. Refused to wear them—and got his own way, too."

We were barely seated when a brisk step crossed the hall and Marvin Cross came into the dining-room. I conceded on first glance that my cousin had acquired considerable presence with the years. He was far from handsome; but he had an air and a carriage. His eyes were arrogant and his taffy-colored hair, brushed straight back, added somehow a note of belligerence to his appearance. Marvin was tall and slender, and in every movement showed grace and ease. His clothes fitted him perfectly.

He quite apparently had not heard of my arrival, for he entered talking.

"Uncle, we must bring them to a show-down," he was saying, sharply. "This preposterous state of affairs can't go on. You may be content to let an old beggar and an ignorant nobody dictate to you, but I'm not. I insist—" At this point he saw me and stopped short. He knew me at once—I could tell that—but I couldn't determine whether it was surprise or annoyance that caused a dull flush to appear on his sallow face.

I got to my feet and held out a hand. He took it reluctantly enough.

"Hello, Marvin," I said.

"Why—hello, Grant."

"The prodigal has returned," said my uncle from the head of the table. "And we must see that he does not get away again."

Something stirred beneath the surface of Marvin's eyes but he didn't say anything more. The very manner in which he sank into his chair, however, I construed as a declaration of war. For my part I welcomed his hostility. It was going to be quite as easy for me to dislike the mature Marvin as it had been to dislike the boy.

To break the tension I made an unfortunate sally at humor. Fixing my glance on his sleek hair, I asked:

"How in thunder did you ever manage to get it out?"

Marvin did not understand at first. His light blue eyes looked coldly and uncomprehendingly into mine.

"Why, the mucilage and ink!" I explained. "You were in a pretty mess the last time I saw you."

He glared at me. "If I'm prepared to forget the crudities of your past, why should you rake them up?" he demanded. And, without another word, he applied himself to his soup.

"I suppose I am a tactless jackass," I said, in an effort to establish matters on a more comfortable basis. "Well, let's sponge all that off the conversational slate and start over again. How are you, anyway?"

"Quite well," answered Marvin, without looking up. If he took any interest in the state of my well-being he did not bother to put it into words. Instead he swung around in the direction of Uncle Peter and, as though it could be held in no longer, addressed the head of the house.

"It's unwise, of course, to discuss our affairs before a stranger, but I can't let this matter rest any longer, Uncle," he said. "There was trouble again today at the Trust offices."

"Trouble?" repeated Uncle Peter, easily. "How could there be trouble?"

"I presented the check you gave me this morning," explained Marvin. His tone was nothing short of savage. "It was for a rather large sum, you remember. Or do you? Anyway, that solemn baboon of a Betters looked at it and refused to give me the money. He said your account was overdrawn."

"Well, perhaps it is. I'll tell Joel tomorrow to sell something for me."

"There you go!" cried Marvin. "You'll get Joel to sell something! Why should that dirty old mendicant handle our affairs? I tell you, Uncle, this has got to stop. I have some rights, I think. You must chuck Joel Huckers out. I can handle your business affairs for you now—and I'm going to insist on it. And if that smug fellow Betters dares to refuse money to me again or to offer me any of his damned advice, he is going to be dismissed from the bank!"

MARVIN was in a cold rage. He brought his attention back to me now.

"I'm sorry you're here when it's necessary for me to discuss a thing like this," he said.

"Oh, you're not boring me," I replied.

"Boring you?" He seemed puzzled for a moment. "Oh! Well, I wasn't looking at it from that angle. See here, is it necessary to impress on you the need for treating all this as confidential?"

"Do you want me to swear a solemn oath?" I demanded, nettled. "Your pin-money troubles are of no interest to me, Marvin."

Uncle Peter had finished his soup. "What I can't understand," he remarked plaintively, "is why there should be trouble all the time about money matters. Why, I have enough money to run half a dozen places like this and supply a round dozen of spendthrift nephews with funds."

"How do you know?" demanded Marvin. "I can't get you down to any kind of a statement about our resources and Huckers—damn his impudence!—refuses even to discuss such matters with me. How do we know he isn't cheating us right and left?"

"Nonsense!" said Uncle Peter, sharply. "I know all about my affairs and I won't have you criticizing me. Especially with Grant just home." He turned to me with a reassuring smile. "Marvin's just in one of his tantrums. Don't get the idea that a—a financial stringency is pending. I'm a very wealthy man, Grant, and proud of the fact. I have"—he looked around the table and laughed happily—"a couple of million tucked away that no one around here has heard of—not even Joel Huckers. Now, what do you think of that?"

Marvin was curiously affected by this news. He reminded me of a tiger crouching in a cage and knowing it is useless to spring because of the bars.

"That just proves what I've been saying!" he exclaimed. "Suppose you were to die suddenly. How could I get things straightened out if you have millions around that I know nothing of? There's nothing else to it, we must have an accounting at once."

But Uncle Peter only laughed. He expanded genially, now that the conversation had turned on his wealth. "Well," he said, winking at me, "what if you did overlook a million or two? There would be plenty for everybody. Besides, I'm not figuring on dying yet. I'm pretty spry. Do you know what I'm figuring on now?"

He dropped his voice confidentially and glanced first at Marvin and then at me. "A proposition was brought to me a few days ago. It involves the transfer of a railroad and the securing of terminal facilities in one of the largest cities in the United States. Two others are in on it and they want me to swing a third. I've just about decided to go in with them. If we put this deal over—" He did not complete the sentence but leaned back in his chair and beamed at us with affable triumph.

Julius Anchor, the colored attendant, had been standing behind his master's chair throughout the meal. He had kept a watchful eye on my uncle and had anticipated every need. Now, happening to glance in his direction, I was surprised to find his gaze had shifted. He was watching Marvin with a curious intentness in his beady eyes.

Marvin was plainly uneasy. "Of course, it's fine that you have the chance to figure in such big deals," he began, "but remember, we have something else on that may tie up your available funds—"

"Jake Sleezby arrived on the same train as I did this afternoon," I interrupted.

The effect of this remark was electrical. I had expected a reaction from Marvin and was not surprised when he turned and glared at me with intense astonishment on his face. What I had not counted on was the effect it had on Julius Anchor. He was very much interested, that was clear.

"Just what do you mean by that?" demanded Marvin.

"Why," I explained casually, "I assumed you were referring to the deal you have on with Sleezby. In the circumstances, the fact that he returned to town today seemed pertinent. That's all."

I imagined that a shadow of a smile brushed across the immobile features of the body-servant. At the same time I didn't quite like his interest.

As for Marvin, he was too upset to speak for a full minute. He made a pretense of proceeding with his meal. After a few ineffectual dabs at the food on his plate, however, he returned to the point.

"Do you know Sleezby?"

"Quite well." I was beginning to enjoy myself. "I've known him for years, in fact. By the way, Uncle, before you do anything more in the Sleezby matter, I want to talk to you about it. I have certain information you might find useful."

UNCLE PETER nodded. Not a sound came from Marvin, but I could see that he was perturbed.

The salad was served. Uncle Peter glanced at his plate and sighed regretfully. "It looks very good tonight," he said. "Don't you think, Jule, I might try just a little?"

"No, suh," replied Julius.

"I suppose you're right," said my uncle, plaintively. "It does upset me."

"Oh, eat your salad if you want it," said Marvin. "I must say, Uncle, I have no patience with the way you submit to Anchor's tyranny. Why should he say what you can eat and what you can't?"

"Because he knows," answered Uncle Peter, with a wry smile. "Every time I go against his advice, I suffer for it. Jule is wiser than a doctor." He turned to me and pointed a thumb back over his shoulder. "Look at that old fellow, Grant. He's an oracle with a blank side to his mind, but the other side as clear as crystal. He always knows when you shouldn't do anything. Jule knows when a thing is wrong. I don't pay any attention when he advises me to do something but when he says 'No' I take his word for it and don't do it. He's a one-way prophet."

Marvin was in that stage of evil humor when an outlet must be found. Here it was.

"I wouldn't give him house room," he said.

Uncle seemed nettled for the first time. "You have a habit of forming such opinions and a nasty way of expressing them," he remarked. "Really, Marvin, you're a trying companion." Then a measure of his usual good nature returned. He smiled back at Julius Anchor over his shoulder. "Perhaps we ought to overlook the outspoken faults of youth, eh, Jule?"

"No, suh," said Julius.

Marvin rose and pushed back his chair. "I'm off," he announced. Then he hesitated and, after a glance at me, said in an entirely even tone: "I hope, Uncle, you will be discreet enough not to discuss our family affairs in my absence."

A rather amazing remark, considering who I was. But by this time I had an accurate gauge of my cousin's character. He was so sure of himself and of his position that nothing else counted. He would refuse to budge an inch in the face of any remonstrance or to consider the feelings of others in what he elected to do or say. Marvin, in other words, was the Crown Prince of Severn.

There was a pause after he left the room. "There are times," said Uncle Peter, finally, "when I positively dislike Marvin."

I would have liked to stay and talk with him if time had permitted. But I didn't intend to be late for Alice's party. So I excused myself and followed Marvin from the room.

Half an hour later I left the house on foot. Of the two cars my uncle kept, one was laid up and Marvin had taken the other. I don't suppose any thought of the duties of hospitality had ever entered his head. He wanted to leave at once and needed a car, so he took the only available one. But, as it turned out, it was a most fortunate thing. If I had not met Marty, the whole course of events would have been changed.

As I set foot on the drive, a dark form detached itself from a near-by mass of shrubbery and a rough voice assailed me.

"Hi, Sport!" it said. "I thought I'd missed you."

I stopped. "Who do you want?" I demanded.

"You. Who d'ya suppose? I got a message for you. From Dinny Wicks. Get me? Dinny says you're to get around tomorrow night without fail. No stalling, see? And you gotta have the kale with you."

"Would it be too much trouble for you to repeat that?" I asked. The fellow had clearly mistaken me for some one else.

"No trouble, Mr. Cross, no trouble at all," went on the stranger. Here, at least, was partial enlightenment. He had mistaken me for Marvin. "It's from Dinny Wicks—Dennison Wicks, esquire. He says for you to see him by tomorrow night. And no monkeyshines. You get down to his place, see? And be sure to take the stuff along. Get that? The kale, the jack. Will I tell him to expect ya?"

"Yes," I replied. "Tell him to expect me."

JOEL HUCKERS lived in a cottage set far back between two larger houses. I stumbled in the dark up a thirty-yard wooden walk from which every fourth board at least was missing. A sagging veranda across the front gave the place a down-at-heel appearance; but inside, it was neat and cheery.

Joel met me at the door. He was wearing horn-rimmed spectacles and had allowed them to slip halfway down his nose. A bulky volume was in his hand and I took it for granted that it was the Bible until, in putting it aside, he revealed the title. It was Boswell's Johnson.

"Mary will be ready in a minute," he said. "No, not that chair, please. Mary has her own ideas in the matter of chairs and it might be wiser if you patronized this one. Now, let me tell you something about my ward. You were surprised, no doubt, when you found that such a person existed?"

I acknowledged that it had been a complete surprise.

"As you know, I never married. But many years ago—nearly fifty, to be explicit—I came very near it." The old man was leaning forward in his chair and, as he proceeded, a rapt look grew on his face. "But—she—preferred some one else. She married him and they moved away. He was a doctor but they didn't prosper. I lost track of her as the years rolled on and it was by the merest accident that I heard of her again a few years ago. She was all alone in the world except for her granddaughter, Mary. I visited her and, by means of a little stratagem that completely deceived her, was able to relieve the pressure a little. A year ago she died and Mary came here to live with me.

"I am beginning to realize," he added, after a pause, "that I haven't been very much of a success as a guardian. I have given her a reasonably comfortable home. But sometimes I can see that she is discontented and sad. You see, she has lacked almost completely the one thing that young people need most, companionship. As the ward of old Joel Huckers, she has been—shunned. It's been very hard for her. I was too blind to see this at first, but a few months ago my eyes were opened. It worries me a great deal."

A light step sounded in the hall and the old man got to his feet with eagerness. "Look after her well," he whispered.

Mary was small, dainty and clear-eyed; very simply but, I thought, effectively dressed in white, with her dark hair massed high on her head in a style that seemed quite distinctive. That it was not in the latest mode was something we both had to learn that evening. There was none of the smartness of the flapper about her and in point of looks she could not be classed with Alice Ford—I have never seen any one who could—but she had enough of beauty of her own and a great deal of charm.

"MARY," said Joel, his voice overflowing with pride and affection, "this is Grant McClay. Grant, my ward, Mary Warner."

We shook hands. I liked the way she did it, a steady, firm grip and a straight look from her blue eyes. Nothing coquettish, nothing forward about her. In fact, as far as first impressions can go, I liked her very much indeed.

Old Joel, in the meantime, was babbling on.

"You look wonderful, Mary, my dear," he was saying. " 'Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bath-rabbim.' You will be the belle of the ball, my dear. Don't you think so, Grant?"

"Grandfather!" protested his ward; but she repaid his biblical exuberance nevertheless with an affectionate smile.

The taxi that I had phoned for on the way over arrived just then. The girl wrapped a lacy old-fashioned shawl sort of thing around her shoulders and smiled. Joel Huckers drew me aside for a moment.

"How did you find things at your uncle's?" he asked in a whisper.

"Dinner wasn't exactly peaceful," I answered in undertones. "Marvin dislikes the idea of my being here and he was at no pains to hide it. Besides, he was riding a high horse over business matters and worried Uncle Peter some."

He frowned and nodded. "And how did your cousin impress you?"

"I'm sorry to say such a thing about my own kith and kin," I said, "but Marvin seems the most disagreeable fellow I've ever met. He carries a sting."

"Did you notice your uncle's manservant, Anchor?"

"Yes, he was very much in evidence. A queer old codger. Who, what, and why is he?"

"He is Peter's right-hand man." He hesitated a moment. "Anchor can be trusted."

That cleared up some of my doubts but not all.

The taxi turned out to be a ramshackle hack, so the drive was a longer one than I had expected. I was glad of this, for Mary Warner and I found each other companionable from the start. She was well read for a girl of her years and with interests that touched mine at many points. We felt like old friends when the hack finally jolted to a spring-protesting stop.

"My first dance!" she breathed. "I wonder—if I'll do all the right things!"

"I'm as nervous as you are," I said. "I hate breaking into these affairs. I wonder if I'll make less of a donkey of myself than usual!"

We shook hands, silently wishing each other good luck in the ordeal before us. When I found my way to the drawing-room, Alice stood just within the curtained archway and welcomed me with a warm smile.

Alice in black velvet! Every time I see her now—and we meet quite often—the effect of her beauty deepens. But nothing can ever eradicate my memory of her as she looked that evening. Certainly I was left with no doubts as to my own feelings toward her.

"I'd almost given you up," she chid. "But—better late and with another girl than not at all!"

"I brought Miss Warner," I explained. "And I want to ask you, Alice, to do your very best for her. Get her lots of partners and all that."

"Trust me," laughed Alice. "Do you suppose I want you dancing attendance on her all night? What's she like, Grant?"

"She's a nice girl," I answered warmly. "Intelligent—and pretty. I like her."

"H'm!" said Alice. "I see it will be wise to keep her occupied with other partners. But—speaking of looks, can you find it in your heart to say a kind word for any one else?"

But I couldn't say anything: I just looked at her. After a pause, she said:

"If your eyes are to be believed—thanks! And now, Grant, on with the formalities. Do you recognize the courtly, distinguished-looking gentleman of not much more than middle age standing beside me here? Meet up with my honored progenitor, Albert Sidney Ford."

"WELCOME back," said Mr. Ford, with a friendly grin. He was tall, a little shrunken in the neck and totally bald. What I remembered about him chiefly was that he had been the owner of the first automobile in town. He had been a marked man in those days.

"Well, you've developed into a pindling sort of fellow, haven't you?" he commented. "The beautiful young lady to my left who, as you will have guessed by the close resemblance she bears me, is my daughter, prepared me for a certain amount of bulk in your case. But, if you'll pardon the frankness and garrulity of age, you certainly are an eyeful, my boy."

"Father manufactures cloth for men, so naturally he's strong for the tall kind," said Alice. "Which has made it nice for me! Most of the eligible men in town run more to brains—"

"Of all the little snipes who've been pitter-pattering around this house!" scoffed her father. He glanced around him. "Do me a favor, McClay, and catch two or three of them between doors if the chance offers, will you? And I've often let myself dream of what would happen if somebody real big and hefty—like you—were to suddenly charge into one end of the stag line. Wouldn't it be a sight to see the jackanapes all go down like nine-pins! But I suppose it would kind of muss up my good hardwood floors."

"That will be all from you," admonished Alice. "What do you mean, insulting my guests? You've done your duty now, anyway, so up you go to that den of yours. I keep him on the third floor, Grant. It's the only safe place."

"I'm going—and glad of the chance. As soon as you get tired of this, McClay, wander up and pay me a visit. I've got the most complete radio equipment in the middle West up there and you'll hear something worth while. If that isn't any inducement, would a man's-size cigar tempt you?"

"That sounds good—all of it," I said. "I'll be up."

I had been keeping an eye on the staircase and now observed Mary Warner coming down. She hesitated at the foot and glanced about rather anxiously. I went to her at once and brought her in. Alice met her cordially and they chatted for a moment or two with every evidence of mutual liking.

The first dance I had with Mary and we got along rather well, considering. The music seemed to indicate a one-step and my partner was clever enough to adapt herself to my rather individualistic style of doing that old-time dance. Every other couple on the floor was doing something entirely different from us, I noticed.

"I like Miss Ford," confided my partner. "She seems very nice. But I don't know about the other girls. A few have spoken to me but—somehow I feel I don't belong."

"Well, from the way I've seen some of these young fellows looking at you it won't be long before you do," I asserted. "I'm going to develop a streak of jealousy if they keep it up."

She smiled up at me, revealing a hitherto concealed dimple in her cheek. But I was sure I detected worry behind the smile.

Alice joined us at the close with a brilliantined gallant who must have stood all of five feet four in his pumps. He was introduced and booked Mary Warner for the next dance but it didn't seem to me that he displayed anything like the proper degree of enthusiasm. It required all of Alice's brightest chatter to keep the four of us up to party pitch. The music struck up again and the others went off.

"No, Grant, you mustn't be so insistent on this dance," mocked Alice. I hadn't said a word about it. "I'm thrilled to have you demand it so masterfully. But it's really promised and I never skip dances."

"You danced the last one with Marvin," I said accusingly.

"And I'll probably keep on. Marvin isn't backward about asking for things. Since you insisted, I'm reserving some time later for you. But—if you don't think it would seem undignified—there's rather a general practice nowadays called cutting in. You really ought to be a rather effective cutter-in, Grant."

A sallow young gentleman interrupted us at this point by claiming her. His manner of doing so was, to me at least, unique. He said not a word but dropped a pink-nailed hand on her shoulder, none too gently. Alice turned toward him. Wrapping his arm around her he fell immediately into step with the music.

"The new cave man," said Alice, laughing over her shoulder. "Keep your eyes open tonight, Mr. Covenanter, and you'll learn a lot."

I had told Alice that I was not anxious for introductions nor further opportunity to display my complete ignorance of modern dancing, so I was left at a loose end. But not for long. A heavy hand fell on my shoulder and a deep voice sounded in my ear.

"Hello, Grant. I've been looking all around for you."

IT WAS Ab Betters. His large square face was aglow with pleasure. Ab had always been the homeliest boy in Severn and now that his hair had retreated back over his high forehead, the general effect had not been improved. But there was a heartiness about him, a suggestion of shrewd sincerity, that fully made up for his lack of good looks. He was dressed in a brownish tweed suit, cut on baggy lines, and his tie favored the tartan idea. Thus attired, he loomed up huge.

"Delighted to see you," I said. "And allow me to congratulate you, Ab, on your success. Every one says you're the coming man of the town."

"Well I'm working hard and getting ahead some," he replied. "There hasn't been anything spectacular about me. Slow and steady is my rule. I stick to conservative methods too. I'm an old-fashioned man. Perhaps you're surprised to see me here like this?" He indicated his informal attire. "I don't believe in dress suits. They're newfangled and snobbish. Men, for me, are divided into two classes—those who have dress suits and those who haven't. Good old-fashioned clothes are good enough for me."

"Well," I said, "you can afford to do as you like because people know you could buy out a dress-suit factory if you wanted to. But if I'd turned up without one, for instance, they would have put me down as too poor to own one."

"Oh, I'm not blaming you," said Betters, hastily. "Say, let's go up and pay Mr. Ford a visit. I don't dance anyway. I'm a Baptist and I don't hold with dancing. The old-fashioned ideas—they're good enough for me, every time."

I saw that Mary Warner was busy and, willingly enough, followed Ab's broad back up the two flights of stairs to our host's den.

It was a small room, looking out over the back yard. The radio craze was in its infancy then but I am sure he had everything in the way of equipment and attachments that had been invented. The room swarmed with coils, wire, batteries and such. In the corners and on the chairs were piles of radio magazines.

He welcomed us heartily. "Always got to have a fad," he explained. "I'd have gone in for flying this time but my bones are too brittle. So I took up radio and I want to tell you, young men, it's a fascinating hobby.

"You two tired of the revelry pretty soon," he went on. "Don't blame you a bit. When I was a young man I swung a mean hoof, but dancing was different in those days. I don't see anything in this new kind of thing. My idea of dancing was to get around and cover a lot of territory."

We sat around and listened to the radio and smoked. Mr. Ford and I used cigarettes but only an old-fashioned cigar would suit Ab Betters. Mr. Ford got Kansas City and located a soprano in Memphis and seemed to regard both facts as remarkable. He discussed the technical side of radio with avidity and was visibly disappointed when we finally rose to go.

"I'm advising you now to come back here for supper, young gents," he said. "Alice has some lobscouse called a salad, all smeared over with dressing, and a sticky punch. I'm going to have cold roast beef—big thick slices, medium rare—and pickles and regular coffee. How does it sound?"

"Great!" said Betters. "I don't hold much with newfangled food. Guess I'll take you at your word."

"That's right," said our host. He motioned me to remain behind. "Just stay a minute, will you, McClay? There's something I want to get off my chest."

When Ab's heavy footsteps descending the stairs assured us of privacy, he turned a worried look in my direction.

"I'M GOING to tell you something in strict confidence," he said finally. "It's this way. I'm scared stiff that one of these days I'm going to have that cousin of yours wished on to me as a son-in-law. I've never interfered with Alice. Since her mother died, she's managed the house and kept everything going fine and I've given her full swing. She's just as capable as she is pretty. And that's saying a lot. But I've got it in my head she's getting set to pull a bone."

I nodded gloomily. There was no reason why I should entertain any hopes on my own behalf, but the idea of Alice marrying Marvin Cross was not one that I could accept. Probably my face showed this, for my host waggled his head sympathetically.

"I have an idea where you stand or I wouldn't talk this way. I can't stand the fellow!" he exclaimed savagely. "He's an insufferable puppy. If Alice brings that human cutworm into my family, I don't know what I'll do. We wouldn't get along, not in a million years, and that would mean I'd lose Alice. And my God, McClay, I can't face that prospect! She's more than a daughter to me. She's my pal!"

He went on, after a moment. "The way

I size it up is this, McClay. My girl has got to make up her mind to settle down right away. She's been running loose long enough. Well, there's only one man that's got any chance against Marvin Cross. And that's you!"

"Me!" I cried in amazement.

"Yes, you," affirmed my host. "Alice has always had you at the back of her head. And tonight, when she told me you had come back—well, I've got some sense and that's how I've doped it out."

"But it's preposterous," I protested. "Can you imagine a girl as beautiful as Alice being tied up for life to a big hulk like me?"

"Oh, hell! Man, we both know there's no one living good enough for that girl of mine. But what's so wrong with you, particularly? I've always thought girls liked 'em man-size. Get that meekness out of your system. The meek may inherit the earth but a meek lover inherits nothing—except the prospect of sewing on his own buttons for life."

"If I thought there was a chance—" I began.

"Make one!" asserted my companion. "There's no time to lose. You hustle downstairs and cut that cousin of yours out."

SOMEHOW, Mr. Ford's words made me feel differently. When I got downstairs Marvin was dancing with Alice and I promptly cut in. He scowled at me, but drifted away without a word.

"At last," said Alice, as we started off. "You know it's scandalous the way I've been vamping you, Grant. And this is positively the first sign of a response. I was beginning to think I had lost my touch."

I don't know what I was doing with my feet; but Alice was remarkably easy to dance with. She floated along ahead of me and somehow I kept in time and out of other people's way.

"I've been talking to your father," I said, although I realized it wasn't just the best way to open the subject. "He seems to feel that you are going to make a big mistake—"

Alice stopped short. "What has that old maverick been saying to you?" she demanded tensely. "I put up with a lot from that parent of mine, but if he has dared—"

"Please, let me explain," I said hastily. "We happened to speak of you and I got the impression he didn't entirely approve of my cousin as—as a son-in-law. In fact, he—" I stopped there, fully convinced now that I had blundered rather badly.

"In fact he—what?" she asked, making no effort to continue the dance.

"Nothing of any importance."

"See here, Grant McClay," said Alice, coldly. "You tell me at once what my ornery father has been saying to you. Everything! And don't try to go into reverse again."

"Well," I floundered, realizing that I was in a deep hole of my own digging, "he seemed to feel that any one would be preferable to Marvin. At least that must have been what he meant because he even thought I—"

"Go on," she prompted, fixing me with a beautiful, but sternly accusative, eye.

"Alice," I stammered, finding words with difficulty, "would there be any chance—at—all—for me?"

She turned with a sharp tapping of heels and walked to a corner of the room where a lone potted palm gave a suggestion of isolation. I followed. Feminine moods are always hard to understand but I certainly was not prepared for the fury with which she faced me.

"When a man asks that question," she stormed, "he's supposed to have thought of it for himself. But even if he is so slow that some one has to give him a hint, he ought to know better than to tell her *that!*"

I saw the enormity of my offense then. As I cast about for words to establish, at any rate, the sincerity of my intentions, one of the sleek-haired seals from the stag line invaded our corner. He laid an assured hand on Alice's arm. And before I could think of anything to do they were off. Alice looked at me.

"Grant—you poor old dumb-bell!" she said.

I couldn't get near her again, either. I danced once more with Mary Warner and found her rather pensive. Then I sat out in the conservatory with Ab Betters and talked of old times until we realized that it was needed by others.

ALICE fluttered about like a lovely black butterfly but she seemed to be purposely avoiding me. In any case I was pretty steadily employed now with Mary

Warner. I was sorry to see that she wasn't enjoying herself as much as she had hoped. The other girls paid her no attention and her partners never seemed to come back, except Absalom Betters. She sat most of the dances out and talked, first to Betters and then to me, making a brave pretense of animation.

"What's the matter with me?" she asked finally. I noticed that her lower lip trembled a little as she spoke. "Oh, I know some of the things. My dress is old style and I do my hair wrong and I dance poorly. But I can't understand why it's so hard to talk to these boys. I've never found it difficult to keep conversation going before. But they seem to freeze up and get dreadfully bored and almost annoyed."

"You're too intelligent for them," I said savagely. "They have a jargon all their own. You've got to talk it or they don't understand you."

"I don't believe one of them would have asked me for a dance if Alice Ford hadn't coaxed them to. She's been lovely to me. And so have you and Mr. Betters."

Alice whirled by at this moment and smiled at my partner. She did not seem to notice me.

"The other girls resent me," went on Mary. "I don't 'belong.' I suppose I was foolish to come."

A few minutes later she came back to the subject. "Marvin Cross hasn't asked me for a dance," she said. "He looked at me rather strangely when I came in, and just bowed. I don't think he is very—polite."

Then she went off with Ab. But a few minutes later he was back, alone. He seemed very much upset.

"Clacking tongues!" he was saying. "McClay, something most disagreeable has happened. Come along."

"What's the matter?"

"Well, we were in the conservatory and another party came in. There were two girls and a man. Apparently they didn't see who we were because they started laughing and—saying things." He swallowed a couple of times before going on. "I didn't mind what they said about me, although it wasn't exactly charitable and, I hope, not true. But then they started talking about Mary.

"We couldn't very well get up then and of course couldn't help hearing every word. There's been a joke going around—something about her dress and the way she dances. Well, you know how girls will talk sometimes. Mary sat like a Trojan and didn't say a word, but I could see she was terribly hurt. I felt like getting up and wringing their silly necks! Then the man joined in."

He was bending over so that no one around could hear what he said.

"It was Marvin Cross," he declared. "He started in and called Joel Huckers a blackleg and a thief and several other highly complimentary names. That seemed to upset her more than anything said before. She went white as a sheet. They moved away then and—well, here we are."

Mary Warner was still pale but she gave me a quiet smile when I walked into the conservatory. She stood up immediately.

"Has Mr. Betters told you?" she asked. "I suppose it's foolish of me to feel upset but I don't believe I could go in and face them again, knowing they've been laughing about me all evening. I thought you wouldn't mind taking me home now. I could slip in and get on my wrap and perhaps you would tell Miss Ford something. You might say I'm not feeling well. It—it wouldn't be so very untrue."

"Yes, that will be best," I agreed. "Take this other door and you'll strike the back hall. You can get upstairs from there. Come down to the library and wait for me. In the meantime, I'll find Alice."

Then I started to find Alice. I didn't—and for a time it seemed that my failure was going to have consequences almost tragic. I looked everywhere, but finally I had to give up and take Mary home.

OLD Joel knew right away that something was wrong, and it seemed better to tell him just what had happened.

"There is nothing I can do—yet," he said. "Mary is dearer to me than all the world but I must stand by and see her unhappy. What a strange tangle it is!"

I made a move to go, but Joel motioned me over to a chair beside him.

"About six months ago we used to see a lot of your cousin," he said. "He came to the house on business and he was clearly attracted to Mary. He paid her a lot of attention. Nothing came of it, of course, and he hasn't been near us now for some time. But Mary liked him. I sometimes think she still does."

How little I knew about such things was shown by my reply. "She won't like him any more," I said. "Not after what occurred tonight. He didn't even ask her for a dance."

Joel was wiser than I. "A woman's heart is strange and wonderful," he said quietly. "I'm afraid there is going to be a heavy score to settle with that young man."

I was all ready for a show-down with Marvin. I didn't know whether Alice had given him her answer or not, but I was pretty sure she had—she had certainly, and with reason, been angry enough with me to do anything. And at breakfast—we followed the English custom at Huntley Court, and selected things from hot dishes on the sideboard—Marvin showed that he was just as ready as I. He said Uncle Peter wasn't so well, and when I, rather formally, said I hoped it wasn't my coming that had upset him, Marvin said it was, and that he was having my things sent down to the Cantlon House!

Marvin had certainly learned one thing since our boyhood—to strike first! I wasn't exactly angry; I was too interested. And a little later Uncle Peter came down, to Marvin's surprise, and when he heard about the hotel idea he blew up, and gave Martin as stiff a reproof as I had ever heard him administer to any one.

That was hard for Marvin to swallow. But right on top of it I opened up about Sleezby. Marvin was furious; he said he had brought Sleezby and his proposition to Uncle Peter, and that I was reflecting on him. I said I certainly was—on his judgment, at least. And Uncle Peter laughed.

"That's enough, Marvin," he said. "I didn't like Sleezby's looks myself, and had decided to turn him down."

Marvin turned green when he heard that. But he was positively livid a minute later when Uncle Peter turned to me and asked me if I couldn't find use for some fresh capital in my own work! Well, I didn't need anything of the sort, but I couldn't resist Marvin. So I acted as if I were very grateful, and, prompted by Uncle Peter, told them about my Montevideo scheme. He was all enthusiasm; insisted that he must get in on that.

Later, though, when I went out, I ran into something that spoiled the fun I had had at breakfast; I met Alice in her car.

"You're out early," I said.

"Oh, I can't sleep in. I just have to get up. Besides, it would spoil the parent's day if I didn't drive him down to work."

A pause followed. Alice finally turned to me and asked: "Has Marvin told you?"

"Not in words."

She held out her left hand. A large diamond glittered on the third finger.

"Well—I hope you'll be happy," I said.

"Thanks, Grant." She doubled up her hand and stared intently at the symbol of her new status. "It's rather a beauty, don't you think? Marvin always does things well. He—he had it with him." There was another pause and then she said: "You left early."

I started to explain but she assured me that Ab Betters had given her the reason. She expressed sincere regret that Mary Warner had been taken ill and told me she intended to call that afternoon.

Then she drove me down to the Huntley Trust office, and I went in to see Ab Betters. I knew now that I had to do something about Marvin, and I didn't want to do it alone. So I told him about the man who had mistaken me for my cousin and the message from Wicks. Ab scowled. He knew a lot about Wicks. And he said I'd have to go to his place alone, because he had been fighting dives like the one Wicks ran, and if he were seen every one would run, thinking it was a raid.

I WAS just on the point of going when a stenographer entered with a note for me. Mr. Marvin Cross had been in, she explained, and, hearing that I was with Mr. Betters, had left the message. It was brief and to the point:

> Despite what Uncle Peter says I am sure it will be wiser for you not to stay at the house. Your bags have been sent to the Cantlon House and a room reserved for you. M. C.

I flipped it across the desk to Betters. "Marvin is the coolest proposition I've ever met," I said; and proceeded to tell him of what had happened that morning.

"I've a hunch," said Ab with a grave face, "that this bumptious cousin of yours is out for a fight to the finish. I wouldn't be surprised now at anything he does.

We've got to expect extreme measures."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, for some reason or other, Marvin is in desperate need of money just now. Perhaps this fellow Wicks has been draining him. The last two weeks he's tried every scheme you can think of to get money out of me here. Now he's got his back to the wall. You've scotched the Sleezby scheme out of which he would probably have drawn a fat commission and you've got him thinking your uncle is going to back you in business. Wicks is on his back. Mark my words, he'll turn and fight now."

"But what can he do?" I asked.

Betters looked much worried. "There are so many things he could do that you don't know where to look for the first blow," he said. "For instance, he'll probably get some legal action started. He won't have a leg to stand on if we ever come to a show-down in the courts. But that would mean publicity which, as you know, must be avoided by any means in our power." Suddenly he stopped and appraised me with a shrewd eye. "By the way, just how much do you know, Grant?"

"Practically nothing," I answered shortly. I was beginning to resent the way in which I was being left in the dark.

"If Mr. Huckers thought it best not to tell you I can't say anything," said Ab.

"I can't make head or tail of it," I exclaimed. "I got up this morning with my mind made up to chuck the whole business and take the next train east. But—I guess I'll have to see it through."

"All I can say is this," remarked Ab after a pause. "Mr. Huckers is one of the ablest and biggest-hearted men that ever walked the earth! If the story is ever told of what he has done— But it never will be."

As I stepped out of the president's office, Mr. Ford entered the rotunda. He saw me at once and came over, fixing me with a reproachful eye.

"Say, young fellow, you certainly spilled the beans," he remarked, gloomily.

"Alice told me the news this morning," I said, with a gravity that equaled his own.

"Yes, but she gave me the doggonedest talking to for what I said to you," said Mr. Ford, pursuing his grievance. "You ought to have had more sense than to tell her that. She's pretty spunky when she gets her dander up. She browned me to a crisp."

"I'm sorry," I apologized. "It was pretty stupid. I guess I've been stupid right through the piece."

Mr. Ford took me by the arm and led me to a window seat where we could talk without interruption.

"See here," he said earnestly. "Do you really like that girl of mine?"

"If she had decided to marry me," I answered, "I'd have been the happiest man in the world."

"Well, then," he exclaimed vehemently, "don't give up! You could win her still. Say, if you had half the gumption I had when I was your age, you'd be up at the house now talking her out of this darn fool engagement."

"But if she wants Marvin—" I began.

"I'm not so sure that she does," he said. "It's beyond me why she can even think of him—the poisonous pup! It can't be love on her part. It's some fool feminine reason that I can't see any rhyme or reason to. Look here—I'm going to get Denver tonight." He winked. "Why not come up?"

"I can't tonight. Betters and I have an important matter to attend to."

"Tomorrow night, then. You can't afford to lose any time."

"All right," I said.

BETTERS was right. Marvin had declared war. When I went to my room at the Cantlon the first thing I did was to look for some documents I needed—and I found, at once, that some of my papers were gone. I made a search then—and found that every bit of my evidence against Sleezby was missing.

In a way, it didn't matter. I needed no such papers to scare Sleezby off. But it showed that we couldn't wait on Marvin—if he were prepared already to go to such lengths, things looked serious. I decided to get after Sleezby at once, and called Betters. He came over, and we went up to Sleezby's room—he, too, was at the Cantlon.

He put up a bluff at a fight told us to go to hell a few times, said we were blackmailers, talked of calling the police. But I was so sure of him that I didn't even make him promise to take the 4:04 east: I knew he would. He had to. All I had to do, and he knew it, was to send telegrams to a couple of detective agencies, which hadn't found out yet that Jake Sleezby and one or two men they had been seeking for some time were identical.

I had lunch with some old schoolmates, and afterward dropped into Joel Huckers's office. I was surprised to see Julius Anchor there; I was still more surprised to hear Ab Betters swear, just as I entered.

"I knew it!" he said. "He's struck—all along the line."

"What's happened?" I asked.

"Well, first of all, he fired all the servants this morning—Anchor, Bantley, the lodge keeper, all the rest. There's a new staff in the place already and a ruffian at the gates who refuses to let any visitors pass. He's shutting Mr. Huntley up."

I was thunderstruck at this information. Knowing how Uncle Peter felt, I was convinced that this step was taken against his wishes. Not at any time had I thought the situation serious enough to lead to anything so drastic or melodramatic as this.

"You mean that no one can get in?" I demanded, in bewilderment.

Ab nodded his head in an emphatic negative. "He's giving it out that your uncle is seriously ill," he said. "At any rate, the place is practically walled up."

A new thought assailed me, a decidedly disturbing one.

"Supposing it's true," I said, "that he is seriously ill! He looked pretty bad at breakfast this morning. How about his doctor?"

"Dr. McGowan has attended him for years. Just as it happens, he went on a fishing trip three days ago and left his assistant in charge. The assistant is a shifty fellow from the East named Addams. I don't trust him. Beyond all doubt Cross has him bought up."

"Is the telephone cut off?"

"Practically. I tried it. A trained nurse answered and said Mr. Huntley was too ill to come to the phone."

"I'm convinced that Uncle Peter is really ill," I declared, after a moment's thought. "Marvin wouldn't dare to keep him prisoner against his will. He's taking advantage of a sudden attack to cut us off this way."

Joel Huckers nodded his head in agreement. He looked drawn about the eyes. Clearly he was very much worried over the situation.

"But that's only the beginning," went on Ab. "Notice has been served of an action against the Huntley Trust and Mr. Huckers. An accounting has been demanded and irregularities are charged in the handling of the Huntley interests. The action is taken in the name of Peter Huntley."

"Uncle Peter has never heard of it!" I said positively.

"Of course not. But so long as we can't communicate with Mr. Huntley, Cross can get away with this. And with other things!"

BEYOND speaking to me when I came in Joel Huckers had remained silent. Now he hitched his chair around until he faced us.

" 'A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities and against the high towers,' " he quoted. "But you mustn't be too apprehensive, Absalom. After all, we can withstand the attack."

"If I saw any way out, I would feel a lot easier in mind," said Betters hopelessly. "But what can we do?"

"Nothing more now," answered the old man, with a note almost of irritation. "We received notice of the action two hours ago. What do you suppose I've been doing in the meantime?"

"As far as I can see there was nothing you could do."

"There was—but it had to be done within those two hours or not at all. I've provided for a series of legal delays which will keep the case from coming to a hearing for —well, quite a long time. That is the best we can do for the present."

Ab looked slightly abashed.

"You lost no time about it then," he said. "While I talked and ramped around, you were sawing wood. Is the case securely tied up?"

"As securely and legally meshed in red tape as if a pettifogging shyster had been handling it," answered Joel bitterly. "All my life I've stood out against legal quibbles and delays—and now I invoke the gods of red tape on the one occasion when delay is needed for my personal benefit. What a comforting thought for a man who all his life has believed in his own honesty and consistency!"

"But everything you've done is strictly regular," urged Betters.

"Strictly regular and in accordance with the best legal practise," said Joel. "I've done nothing that our most reputable lawyers would not to. Does that set your mind at rest?"

"Why, of course!" answered Ab, clearly puzzled. "Particularly as the cause is a just one."

"I know the end justifies me," said Joel testily. "But I am aggrieved at the means it has been necessary to employ."

"What I am interested in knowing is this," I broke in. "When this action goes into court, will any irregularities be revealed?"

"A great irregularity," answered Joel. "But not, I assure you, an actionable one."

"Is there any danger," I asked, after a pause, "that any harm—physical harm—will come to Uncle Peter? If he has made a will favorable to Marvin—"

"What do you think, Anchor?" asked Joel, looking sharply at the colored man in the corner. "Is Mr. Huntley in any danger?"

"No, suh," was the reply.

Joel glanced back in my direction. "I share Peter's belief in the infallibility of Anchor's negative," he said. "No, I'm sure there is no danger of foul play. I believe Marvin is in the dark as to whether there is a will or what it contains. We can be sure of one thing. He will take advantage of your uncle's isolation to get a deed executed favorable to himself."

This brought the discussion around to grounds where I felt more familiar. "Very well, then, let's smash a way in!" I exclaimed. "That's the only course left to us. Marvin's holding Uncle Peter a prisoner. Once we rescue him, we clear up the whole mess and my dear cousin is out of luck."

Joel's eyes gleamed but after a moment he shook his head.

"It's not as simple as all that. Still, what do you think, Anchor? Should we attempt force?"

"No, suh."

"Right. Right again!" exclaimed Joel. "As things stand, your cousin holds all the cards. He can produce the doctor and nurses to prove that Peter is too ill to see any one. And also in the meantime he can produce any kind of signed document he needs. Marvin is clever and—he knows Peter's signature. If we gain possession of Peter, we can prove all this—but until we did so we would be no better than housebreakers in the eyes of the law if we attempted an assault on the place. And you may be sure that Marvin has figured on the possibility of attack and is well prepared."

I argued the point but to no purpose. The logic of the situation was against me. Besides, I realized how desirable it was to avoid publicity. We could not afford to stage a free-for-all around Huntley Court. Marvin was astute enough to know this and probably had counted on it in taking his gamble.

"Have we got to sit back," I fumed, "and watch while Marvin keeps my uncle penned up in a sick room and bullies him into doing everything he wants?"

JOEL had risen from his chair. He walked to the window and for several minutes remained there, looking out. Finally, he turned.

"I promise you this," he said. "If Marvin Cross does not come to his senses, I will finish this matter soon—in a few days. I am very reluctant to act. It seems to me almost better to suffer any consequences than to do—what it will be necessary to do. But I would step in without hesitation if I could be sure of one thing—"

As it happened I could have supplied him with the information he needed right then. Practically every one in Severn could have done so by that evening. But Joel, who was not a close newspaper reader, did not find it out himself. And as a result certain interesting and unusual things took place.

The sound of feminine voices had been coming to us from the front veranda and I was eager to be off, for I had recognized the owner of one of them. When the conference broke up, however, Alice was just on the point of leaving. She turned at the sound of our footsteps in the hall.

"You're having lots of visitors today, Mary Warner," she said.

Betters was right at my shoulder and I was glad to hear him say: "Business brought us this time, Miss Ford. But I, for one, am coming back often for an entirely different reason if I can get Miss Mary's consent."

"You didn't need to tell me that," said

Alice teasingly. "I watched you last night. Now I don't want to hurry you two along but, if you really did come on business and are leaving now, I have Dad's bus here and can drop you anywhere you say."

"Good!" boomed Ab. "We'll just pile in and you can take us over to the depot."

As we were turning to go, Mary Warner laid a detaining hand on my sleeve.

"Could I speak to you for just a moment?" she said, hesitantly.

The other two walked on ahead down the dilapidated board walk. Mary Warner, I noticed now, was looking rather wan and tired. She leaned against a post of the veranda and kept her gaze studiously on the departing couple.

"Alice was wearing a diamond ring," she said finally, in a low tone. "Do you know whose it is?"

"She's engaged to Marvin Cross," I said.

"Marvin!" She pronounced the name in a whisper. Then she turned and I saw that she had become quite white.

"That—that was all," she said, after a moment. "I was just curious. Good-by, Mr. McClay."

Ab Betters, with heavy-footed gallantry, climbed into the front seat of the car beside Alice and I, perforce, had to content myself with the tonneau. She turned and made a saucy grimace behind his broad back but for the whole drive he monopolized her.

We pulled in at the station platform just in time. The Eastern Flyer, running on the second, came puffing in. I leaned out of the car and scanned the crowd on the platform closely. The pudgy figure of Jake Sleezby was not hard to locate and with a sense of relief I nudged Ab in the shoulder.

"Well, that's that," said Ab.

But we were due for a surprise. Just as Sleezby reached the Pullman steps, Marvin Cross shoved through the crowd and motioned him to stop. They engaged in a moment's conversation, heads close together. Then the promoter labored up the steps and Marvin crossed the platform in our direction. He had not seen us before, apparently; for suddenly, catching sight of the car, he stopped dead. He frowned with annoyance, then raised his hat to Alice and continued down the platform.

"Well—he's gone," said Ab.

"I'm not so sure!" I exclaimed suddenly. "Look here, Ab. I'm positive, now I come to think of it, that he didn't take away as many bags as he brought with him. He must be planning to come back."

"Wait a minute. I'll go back and pump the ticket agent."

He returned on the run, his face crimson. "The fellow's trying to double-cross us," he said, excitedly. "Bought his ticket for Severn Junction. The Flyer stops there, so he'll get off and take a taxi back to town. He probably intends to hole up in some obscure hotel."

"Well," I said emphatically, "it's getting clearer all the time that we'll have to meet Marvin with his own weapons. Half-measures won't do."

"I'm with you there," replied Ab. "But if anything develops tonight to our advantage, it will be wiser to keep our own counsel, I think. Mr. Huckers is apt at times to exhibit queer scruples. I must confess I don't always understand him."

AB BETTERS drove me out to Wicks's roadhouse that night. But the most significant thing that the trip revealed was something we saw on the way out—Mary Warner, driving through Fairview Park with Marvin Cross! I wasn't surprised, but I have never seen a more crestfallen or amazed man than Ab. He had gone along for years without thinking about girls at all. Mary, I had known at Alice's dance, had stirred him deeply. And now—this!

I couldn't soften it for him, though. He pressed me with questions as to what I knew, and I told him I was afraid Mary was still in love with Marvin. He didn't have much to say after that.

Dinny Wicks didn't know me at all, of course; he grinned faintly, when he understood that his agent had made a mistake.

"Still," I said, "we might do business. You want your money, I take it."

He asked me questions—tried to find out whether I was acting for Marvin or against him. It didn't seem to me that he cared much; he just wanted to know. Finally he took a piece of paper from his pocket—a check.

"That's the story," he said. "That's a check, made out to me. For five hundred dollars. I might sell it for five thousand. I doubt if the bank would give me five cents for it."

I wasn't surprised. It wasn't hard for me to believe Marvin capable of forging Uncle Peter's signature to a check. But what I wanted was not the check itself, but detailed information as to the circumstances. I was willing to pay for that, and said so.

"I'm selling the check," said Wicks. "Price has gone up, too. Ten thousand, now."

"Suppose I pay you that for the information?" I said.

He hesitated; looked at me.

"Wait a minute," he said.

He was gone about ten minutes. When he came back he looked like a mule.

"Nothing doing," he said. "Can't do business with you at all. On your way!"

"But—"

"I said nothing doing," he repeated. "Beat it."

I did just that—I had no choice. Ab was not surprised, either.

"You accomplished this much," he said. "You raised the price. Marvin'll have to find ten thousand instead of five—and I can't see just how he can do it."

"This is all pretty mysterious, Ab," I said. "How can you refuse to honor my uncle's checks? He *is* the trust company, practically, isn't he?"

But he would say nothing, except that I must talk to Joel Huckers.

"And he won't talk!" I said disgustedly. "Won't do anything, either." Then I got a hunch. "Ab," I said, "if Marvin really has to have money, he can get it."

"How?"

"By selling some of the antiques in that house. They're nearly priceless. Any dealer would give him more than ten thousand for the tapestries alone."

"Great grief—that's so!" said Ab, looking worried. "I never—"

"Well," I said, "why wait for his alleged brain to get the idea? Why not have a dealer call him up—insist on immediate delivery—send a truck and three or four husky lads up after the stuff? Marvin would have to let them in—and—I'd be one of them! It's a way to get to Uncle Peter, in spite of his guards and thugs."

Ab argued a lot, of course, being Ab. But I brought him around—and once he gave ground at all he became extremely enthusiastic. He was the one who got hold of Winterbottom, the big local dealer, whom he knew well. He told him enough to enlist his aid, and we cooked up the whole scheme that night. We were to try it next day, and, just to make assurance sure, Ab was to telephone Marvin to come to his office to discuss a settlement with him, Joel Huckers, and me. With him out of the house, we decided, it would be plain sailing.

It was as neat a plan as I ever saw worked out. And it seemed, the next afternoon, to be working perfectly. They let us through the gates in the truck without any trouble, and I, posing as the foreman, went to the front door while the others took the truck around behind. A new man servant admitted me; he said Mr. Cross had been called away, but he could show me what was to be taken. I followed him into the great hall—and there was Marvin, smiling unpleasantly.

"SO YOU'VE paid me another visit," he said.

I looked around. The butler had vanished. But I was sure Marvin had plenty of help close at hand. Otherwise he would not have been rocking back and forth on his toes with a look of complete security and mockery on his face.

"Not to see you," I said. "I've come to get Uncle Peter."

"A big order," mused Marvin. "And a silly scheme generally. Planned and carried out, if I may say so, with the blindness and disregard for detail so often found in people who run to bulk rather than brains. Well—now that I've seen you and enjoyed my laugh—you had better go, Mr. Grant McClay."

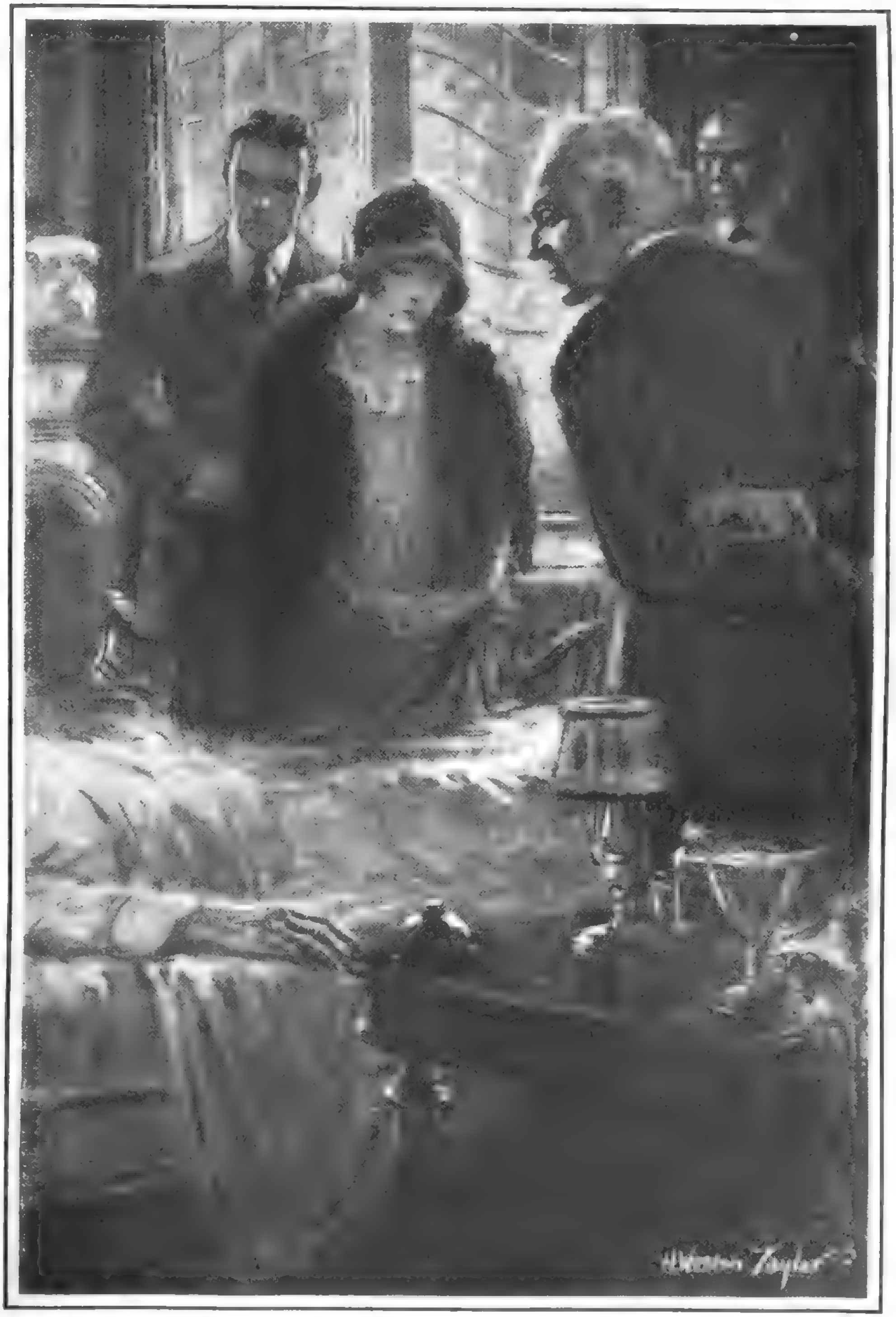
I edged a little closer to him.

"Not yet," I declared angrily. "I haven't had my laugh yet."

Marvin looked around with a certain degree of uneasiness. He was regretting the arrangement, I think, which had left him alone with me.

"Take my advice and be off," he blustered. "If you don't leave at once, I'll see you get a thorough beating."

"No?" I cried eagerly. "Do you really mean it, Marvin? That you'll show fight? I was afraid you wouldn't risk it. You


H. Weston Taylor

Uncle Peter was dead. He had tried to signal; or, perhaps, had signaled in vain.

know, I've got you dead to rights on this antique deal. But enough of that. If you've got a fight in your system, trot it on!"

Marvin reached out and touched a bell on a small table beside him. Instantly a door opening under the stairway was thrown back and there trooped in two of the toughest-looking bruisers it had been my fortune to see in some time. I was sure now that my companions had been stuck up and bundled into the truck. Possibly they were already on an enforced journey back. The odds were three to one, at least.

"Now," asked Marvin, "will you go?"

"No!" I roared, and made for him.

Marvin stepped nimbly away and I turned to meet the foremost of his hired help. I am not ashamed of what followed and always tell of it to counterbalance my stupidity in walking into Marvin's trap. I was in my own element now and, if I say so myself, I am a good man in a rough-and-tumble.

I landed a sound upper-cut on the jaw of the first thug which rocked him back on his heels and caused him to trip over a bear rug on the floor. The other was on me, however, and I had to give back a few paces. Then, behind them, a safe distance off, I caught the grinning face of Marvin, and I threw discretion to the winds and rushed.

I can't tell what followed in any detail or even with coherence. It was a mad jumble of blows and shouting and struggling. I was knocked about and beaten and kicked. My arms were going like flails for I constantly felt the shock that comes when fist encounters solid flesh; once, I am sure, I doubled up my knee and caught one of them somewhere near the midriff, sending him reeling to the floor. We collided with a wall clock and sent it crashing. A chair cracked beneath us, tables were overturned. I heard screams and, looking up, found the winding stairway dotted with heads. Marvin's was there and I saw also the white cap of a nurse. I heard a bell ringing far off in the house and the thought came to me that it was Uncle Peter, roused by the tumult and unable to get any response from the watching servants.

And then suddenly it was all over. I brushed the perspiration—or perhaps it was blood—from one eye, and glanced about me. One of my opponents was doubled up over a broken table and looking very miserable and sick. The other was limping off briskly toward the back hall. Somehow I had succeeded in putting them both out of action.

I straightened up. "Now, Marvin," I called. "Come down and we'll finish our argument."

And then—blackness. It rolled over, engulfed me. I was conscious for some infinitesimal fraction of a second of a great pain and of feeling myself going. I learned later what had happened. When Marvin saw I was holding my own with his precious pair, he sent word to the new butler to join in. The fellow arrived just as the fight was over, and, as he happened to be behind me, with great presence of mind he took an Indian war club off the wall and let me have it full on the back of the skull.

I came to in a vacant lot, to the disappointment of some boys who had thought me dead, and were waiting for the policeman one of them had gone to get. They were good kids, though, and got me a taxi before the policeman arrived; and after the nearest doctor had attended to my bruises and a rather nasty cut on the back of my head, and assured me that I wasn't badly hurt, I went to Ab's.

I felt pretty cheap. Ab was greatly distressed. He had tried to warn me and call me back when Marvin didn't come to his office, but it was too late then. Marvin, very plainly, had been tipped off—and when I found out, by some judicious questions, that Ab and Mr. Huckers had talked about the plan that morning at Joel's house, I knew that Mary had given him the warning. It hurt—but I knew that when one was in love one wasn't wholly responsible. And I said nothing about it. Why make Ab and Joel feel worse than they did already?

I wasn't, I suppose, fit for the effort, but I knew that nothing was going to keep me from going to Alice's that night to keep my appointment with her father. So I turned up, and, while I wore a dinner jacket, I was a good deal of a wreck.

"GRANT!" Alice exclaimed, when she saw the condition I was in. "What have you been doing?"

"My guess," said her father, who had

ambled in after her, "is that he has been riding with Ab Betters in that automobile of his."

"Dad, you have no imagination," chid Alice. "I can think of lots better explanations than that. Perhaps, he's been holding up the mails, or inventing a new explosive, or"—she struck an attitude—"defending some innocent girl's reputation!"

"The explanation is very simple," I said, grinning. "I've been fighting."

"Good Lord! McClay, I'd never have guessed that in a million years!" cried Mr. Ford, looking thunderstruck. "What are we coming to! A young man calling on my daughter acknowledges that he's been fighting. The only fighting Alice's callers ever seem to do is with a cup of tea and a plate of lady's fingers!"

Alice had seated herself on a couch and I made bold to occupy the other end of it. Her father drew up a chair and planted himself in front of me.

"I'm a well-trained modern father and I haven't done this sort of thing in five years," he declared. "I always give Alice the whole ground floor of an evening. But if you don't mind I'll just stick around until I hear how you accumulated all the decorations. On with the tale, my hearty!"

That put me in quite a fix. After all, Alice was wearing Marvin's ring and, unless some miracle happened, she would some day marry him. It made it rather difficult for me to tell what occurred.

"Well," I began, hesitating, "I had broken into a house—"

Mr. Ford slapped his knee resoundingly. "Magnificent!" he exclaimed. "McClay, you ought to write fiction. I can't imagine a finer, more inspiring start for a story than those words you have just uttered: 'I had broken into a house'!"

"Yes," said Alice, "but what house?"

"Uncle Peter's," I answered. "You see—this is all rather difficult to explain—but my things had been moved to a hotel and the house had been put under guard. And, as it was absolutely necessary for me to get in and see Uncle Peter, I worked up a scheme to go disguised as a furniture mover—"

Mr. Ford took out a handkerchief and mopped his bald pate vigorously. "Wait," he pleaded. "You've got me bogged down in the first reel. Would it make it any easier for you to give a full and clear recital if you dismissed the thought of Alice's——er—affiliations? Just to oblige this modest young man, turn that digit decoration the other way, will you, offspring? The look of it kind of gives me the pip, anyway."

"Very well, Parent," said Alice, turning the ring on her finger. "I want to hear the story as much as you do."

So I started in and told them the tale as intelligently as I could. When I came to the fight Mr. Ford leaned forward in his chair, resting both hands on his knees, and stared at me.

"Hold hard, mate," he interposed. "We now approach what seems to me to be the climax, not to say the cream, of the whole story. How many did you say there were of these hired pork-and-beaners?"

I hadn't said, as a matter of fact. I don't make any particular pretensions to modesty but I hesitated about telling of that scrap. It had begun to seem unreal even to me. But when I paused, Mr. Ford lost all patience.

"Do you know the greatest line in all literature?" he demanded. "It occurs in a story called 'Kidnapped,' by an obscure writer of the name of Robert Louis Stevenson. There's a character in that story, Alan Breck, who takes his claymore in hand and drives a bunch of pirates single-handed right down one side of the ship. And when he comes back to his companion, he struts and says, 'Davie, mon, am I no a bonny fichter?' I pick that line above anything else ever written. Well—how many did you say there were?"

"Two," I answered. "During the actual scrap. Some one else must have come in at the finish, though. I was knocked out from behind."

"Three," mused Mr. Ford. "No, you must mean four. Cross was there, wasn't he?"

"Yes. But—he didn't actually participate."

"Where was he?" demanded Mr. Ford in an irate tone.

But I refused to tell anything more. It had been hard enough for Alice as it was. She hadn't said a word, just stayed in her corner of the couch with her arms hugging her knees and looking away off somewhere—anywhere but at me.

Mr. Ford got up, fidgeted around, walked to the front window, whistled a bar or two of some air I didn't recognize, adjusted a picture, kicked a rug straight and finally came and sat down again.

"Oh, well!" he said.

AT THAT moment Marvin was announced. He looked a little worried when he came in, I thought, and the sight of me did not serve as any tonic. He stopped and frowned.

"Good evening," he said stiffly. "I was sure you wouldn't have company tonight, Alice."

Alice deposited her trim feet on the floor and smoothed out her skirt.

"I'm not sure that I have company," she remarked. "Was it to see me you came, Grant, or to hear a radio concert as put on by that wireless wizard, Albert Sidney Ford?"

"I came to see you," I declared. Her father's eyes snapped approval at that and somehow I felt that Alice was pleased, too. I added: "This seems to be our day to meet, Marvin."

"It seems to be your day to butt in where you're not welcome," replied Marvin coldly. It was the first time I had ever heard him use anything in the nature of slang.

"Well," I countered, "why don't you breeze along, if you find my company so unpleasant? Let me recommend—a drive in Fairview Park."

Marvin's eyes came round at that and he stared at me hard for a moment.

"That, I suppose, accounts for your presence here," he said. "Have you been spreading news?"

"He's a poor hand at that," declared Mr. Ford. "I've been trying to get out of him why he's all done up in vinegar and brown paper. But he's too blamed modest."

"You've piqued my curiosity now," said Alice sweetly. "When were you driving in Fairview Park? And with whom?"

Marvin promptly switched the attack in my direction.

"I understand that—er—your caller went for a drive himself last night," he said. "After appropriating a message not intended for him, he went to the sender and tried to buy information with which to annoy me."

"What kind of information would that be?" demanded Alice. "Have you a past, Marvin?"

"I acknowledge the corn," I said. "I did intercept a message and I did try to buy up some information about—er—your other caller. But there was something that I refused to buy." I regarded him steadily. "Something that I could have used to rather good advantage at the present moment. But Mr. Dennison Wicks—"

"Dinny Wicks!" exclaimed Mr. Ford. I could see that he was taking great delight out of the turn of the conversation. "Say, what kind of company are you two young blades keeping, anyway? Do you know Wicks?"

"Parent," reproved Alice, sternly, "one more remark like that and it's you for the third floor back."

"What! And miss the rest of this scrap? Not much! I'm going to be needed to referee, anyway."

Marvin was clearly very much annoyed at the whole occurrence. He bit his lip and looked at Mr. Ford as though doubtful of that gentleman's future value as a father-in-law.

"Your services will not be required in that capacity, I assure you," he said coldly. "This scene is not going to be continued. I'm through with fighting."

"You haven't started!" I cried.

Mr. Ford got red in the face but, in fear of banishment perhaps, gave vent to no sound. Marvin rose.

"I'm speaking to you for the last time," he said, as cold now as ice. "And I'm giving you due notice that I'm not going to rest until I've had you run out of town! I'm going to see, what's more, that you don't trap Uncle Peter into putting money into your fake schemes. That"—to Alice—"was his sole object in coming back."

"That," I cried, "is false! Now here's my ultimatum. I'm going to stay here until I've got to the bottom of this whole business. And as for you, Marvin, I'm going to fight you from—"

But Mr. Ford stopped me.

"—the circumstances," he said dryly, "I move that this meeting do now adjourn."

"I agree for once with Mr. Ford," said Alice. "I hardly think either one of you is in a sufficiently calm state of mind now for polite conversation with a lady."

"The ayes seem to have it," declared her father. "And, if you will pardon a suggestion from an ardent peace advocate, it might be wise to depart at intervals of, say, two minutes. Who cares to go first?"

Marvin rose stiffly and bowed to Alice. "With your permission, I shall be glad to go first," he said. "Thanks, Alice, for this most pleasant evening."

"THE question before the house now is—what of your evening and mine?" said Mr. Ford. "I don't see that we would be breaking faith if you were to go out for a brisk walk of about two minutes and then come around to the library door and go right on upstairs to my den. How about it?"

"My prospects are blank otherwise," I said.

"I'm going to get Denver sure," he urged.

And so, not reading refusal in Alice's eyes, I found my hat, shook hands with her ceremoniously and went for a tramp around two blocks. I was back and comfortably seated in Mr. Ford's den in less than five minutes.

We spent a pleasant and chatty half-hour or so. My host fretted and fumed over his apparatus and got the orchestra at the Cantlon House and a basso profundo from somewhere. I told him more details of the curious situation in which I found myself and he gave very close attention to that.

"Can't make head or tail of it," he said finally. "But you can lay to this much: The Huntley interests are very much over-estimated. I know that for a fact. Pete Huntley isn't anywhere near ready to give old man Rockefeller a run. Probably that's at the bottom of it. When a fight begins to get nasty, it's because the pocketbook is involved."

"I judge not in this case from what Joel Huckers says."

"That old bird is a queer one. I can't figure him out any more."

After a time the entertainment seemed to lag. I sat in a state of unwarranted but acute expectation. And at last I did hear a step on the stair. It came to the first landing, hesitated there and then came on up. A vision of blue and gold appeared in the doorway.

"Did you get Denver?" asked Alice.

We both scrambled to our feet. "Well, well, well!" exclaimed Mr. Ford. "An unexpected boon. Usually of evenings, McClay, I sit up here all by myself and occasionally a scrap of her gay laughter floats up to me from below. But tonight I am actually honored with her presence."

I spilled some half-hundred radio magazines out of the only other chair in the room and Mr. Ford dragged forward a box of some heavy claptrap and turned it over for a footstool. Alice seated herself with a great show of ceremony.

"What a fuss!" she said. "You two make me feel like quite somebody of importance. Now then, what have you been doing up here?"

"Your father has been most entertaining," I answered. "But I must confess that for the most part I have been—waiting."

"Grant," she crowed, "you certainly are coming on!"

Mr. Ford looked rather longingly at his well-loved set. "If you would really like me to try for Denver—" he hazarded.

Alice settled that suggestion with one look. "We are now going to listen," she announced, "to Broadcasting Station Grant McClay. And the subject of his discourse is going to be 'My Life for the Past Ten Years.'"

So, for the next hour I talked about myself. I told them of the railroad I helped to build through a stretch of the Andes; and of the time I got mixed up in a perfectly futile but rather sanguinary little war in Central America; and about the dam that smashed up on us in Arizona; and my hunting trip after a snow leopard in western China; and a little about building railroads behind an army. Anything pertaining to engineering is interesting and perhaps I talked with less dullness than usual. At any rate Mr. Ford sat out my monologue without once looking at the silent radio and Alice sat curled up in her chair—a habit she has—and followed every word I said.

"If you'll come again, I *will* get Denver for you," declared Mr. Ford, when I rose to go.

"If you'll come again, I'll promise that he won't," said Alice firmly. "In fact, it's just possible I might shoo him out of the room entirely next time."

I ROSE rather late the next morning and I had barely finished shaving when the telephone rang. Mr. Ford was at the other end and in a state of mind compounded in equal parts of excitement and amusement.

"Had an early caller this morning," he explained. "Mr. Marvin Cross dropped around to see me. He felt that as my prospective son-in-law he must insist on a very obnoxious fellow called Grant McClay not being received at my house any more. I kidded him along a little and he got right up on his hind legs then and issued an ultimatum: you or him. Just then in walked Alice and I realized that, after all, it was her fight. She would have to decide which we were going to do—kick him out or eat dirt. So I left them there to have it out and came on down to the office."

"Heavens, man!" I exclaimed. "You should have stayed to help her. Alice—"

"Don't worry about Alice," said Mr. Ford easily. "That girl of mine can look after herself. What's worrying me is whether you can look after yourself."

"I'm feeling pretty fit again," I said, with a laugh.

"Yes, but this is different," he answered seriously. "Marvin let it out that he is going to have you arrested today. He was on his way down to the police station to swear out a warrant against you."

"I couldn't ask for anything better!" I cried. "If he does that it will bring everything to a head—which is exactly what I want. But I never thought he would have the nerve to call in the police. I've got him dead to rights on his attempt to sell Uncle Peter's antiques."

"I thought about that," said Mr. Ford, "and on the way down I dropped in at Winterbottom's store. Winterbottom left this morning suddenly for some unknown destination and won't be back for several weeks. I found out another thing. Cross was in to see him last night. Could you tie anything on him without Winterbottom's evidence?"

"Not a thing," I said. The situation was beginning to look serious. I realized that my action of the previous day might land me in unpleasant complications; but I was not particularly worried about it.

"Cross is fighting *now*," said Mr. Ford. "I can't say I admire his methods, but he may make this town a bit warm for you. But what I wanted to say was this: If it should happen that you have to go down to see the turnkey and get measured for a cell, there's an obscure business man named A. S. Ford who's willing to brave the power of the Huntley millions and put up bail—or any other little service that may seem necessary."

I WAS struck by the deference being paid to Mr. Huckers by three men I found in Ab's office—solid men, all of them; and when Joel went out with them I spoke of this.

"They're from out of town," he said. "Dealing with Mr. Huckers, they naturally respect his ability and judgment. Even if he is only your uncle's man of affairs, it is with him that they have to do business. No one in Severn has guessed the real status of Mr. Huckers. There are perhaps three or four who know what a power he is. But none of them live in Severn. To the people of the town he is merely, as you say, a broken-down lawyer subsisting on an allowance."

"Is the allowance a fiction?"

Ab nodded. "And a cruel one. I don't know how many believe it—but probably most of them do. Mr. Huckers has accepted the stigma of it without any resentment."

This fitted in perfectly with the explanation that I had already formed in my own mind.

"It is quite clear to me now," I said, "that Uncle Peter has not been—entirely responsible—for some time. Is that the explanation?"

"If it were—and I'm not saying either yes or no—it would only be a partial one," answered Ab. "There's something else behind this. Something less palatable for the Huntley family even than what you have already suggested."

By my prospect of going to jail Ab was only amused.

"You'll find the county jail a much improved place," he said. "Two years ago we had a clean-up. I was chairman of the civic committee of investigation and we made things hum."

He was so pleased with the picture of me sitting in one of his improved cells and eating meals approved by his committee of reform, that I found it difficult to get him down to serious discussion of the matter. Finally, however, he mopped his eyes with a blue checkered handkerchief and descended to a rational explanation.

"Everything is going to be settled today," he said then. "I had a straight talk with Mr. Huckers this morning and convinced him that the time had come for a show-down. He gave in very reluctantly. We're to see Marvin this morning and it won't take long to settle that young gentleman's hash. Mr. Huckers was very insistent about getting some personal matters settled before we started in to blow the lid off, or the whole business would have been over by this time."

"Well," I said, with a sigh of relief, "I certainly am glad that we're going to get down to brass tacks at last."

"In the meantime," said Ab, with a wide grin, "if you prefer not to test out the good works of the Jail Reform Committee, I can probably arrange with Chief Boland to hold that warrant for a few hours."

"If it's not asking too much," I said, grinning back.

"I have another object in keeping you at large. It might be a good thing for you to trail along with the old man. Now that I've got him convinced, I hate to let him get away by himself. You go home with him, Grant, and if necessary keep his resolution up to the sticking point. Don't let that double-action hydraulic conscience of his get working."

"Very well," I said. "I'll keep him in tow. And, by the way, have you found any trace of Jake Sleezby?"

"He's in town but I haven't been able to locate him yet. I found the taxi he returned from Severn Junction in, so there's no doubt he's still in town. He's probably registered under an assumed name at one of the hotels. I'll find him today sure."

When Mr. Huckers came back it was to announce that he was going home for an hour or so, and Ab with a significant gesture, urged me to go with him.

We had turned on to one of the quiet residential streets and were nearing his home when a persistent noise behind us caused me to glance back. Some little distance in the rear was a gathering of boys, perhaps six or eight, and they were laughing and shouting in concert. It gradually dawned on me that it was a kind of chant and aimed at my companion. As far as I could piece out the words, the refrain ran:

Watch out for old Joel Huckers,
He-sits-in-his-office-and-skins-the-suckers.

At first I could hardly believe my ears, but then I recalled several instances in the dim past when I as a boy of perhaps six or seven had joined with groups of equally callous lads and serenaded in the same fashion some well-known town character. There had been old Doc Keating, for instance, who slept in the civic stables and walked with a paralytic hitch. Boyhood is the real age of cruelty.

I glanced uneasily at my companion's face and found that it bore a smile.

"They honor me in this way at times," said the old man, without any evidence of rancor. "You recall, of course, how the children came out of the city and mocked Elisha and cried, 'Go up, thou baldhead'? I've always thought the chronicler went astray when he recorded that the prophet called two she-bears out of the woods to tear two-and-forty of the children to pieces. I just don't believe that. After all, boys will be boys. I am never able to feel any anger at what children do."

The jeering chorus still rose behind us: "He - sits - in - his - office - and - skins - the - suckers."

I stopped and turned back. The boys broke and ran. Then, seeing that I had not actually started in pursuit, they formed ranks again and raised a still shriller clamor.

"Yes, boys will be boys. But just the same," I said grimly, "if they keep this up I'll go back there and tan some of their hides."

"You may be interested to know how history repeats itself," went on Joel. "When I was a small boy and my father used to come home dead-drunk on fairly frequent occasions, the boys of the neighborhood used to follow him just like this. I've never forgotten the words." He repeated them in a low singsong:

"Ike Huckers, the bleary-eyed bummer,
Drunk all the whisky made last summer."

He laughed, perhaps a little bitterly.

JOEL told Mary I'd had no breakfast, and she went to work at once. She was an adorable little thing; the sight of her made me more bitter than ever against Marvin. She gave me eggs and toast and coffee, and while I disposed of them I got my chance to ask her a question.

"You did warn Marvin—" I began.

"Yes," she said defiantly. "I'm sorry you were hurt."

"It's all right," I said. "But—stay neutral now, Mary, till this is settled. You'll be better off every way if you do."

She burst into tears, but collected herself when Joel came back. He wasn't alone—to my amazement Alice was with him, looking deeply troubled.

"Peter is seriously ill!" he exclaimed. "Miss Ford learned today that a specialist was called yesterday and should arrive from Chicago on the noon train. Peter"—he spoke the words with difficulty—"is—in danger."

"I tried to get you at the hotel, Grant," Alice said. "They told me you were out, so I took a chance you might be here."

"I must go to Peter at once," said Joel, with almost pitiable eagerness. "He needs me. We can get in—somehow."

"I'll drive you," offered Alice promptly. "I came in father's car on purpose."

"No time to lose, then," I said. "Perhaps it would be just as well to pick up Betters and Julius Anchor. Let's go."

"What's wrong with Mary?" whispered Alice, as I took the front seat beside her. "She wasn't exactly cordial, was she?"

"I suppose you might as well know," I answered. "The fact of the matter is—she's in love with Marvin."

"So?" said Alice, quite surprised. After a moment she turned toward me and smiled. "Well, anyway, that settles one point to my satisfaction."

I asked her what she meant but could get no explanation.

WE PICKED up Ab Betters and Julius Anchor, and Alice made the car fly in the direction of Huntley Court. In almost no time at all we turned in at the main drive. A heavy-set fellow came out of the side gate and regarded us belligerently.

"Can't come in," he ordered. "No one allowed in."

"It's important," I called. Alice turned the car slowly in the direction of the gates.

"Keep out! Do you hear me? Keep out!" roared the guard.

Alice gave one glance at the iron gates, which were swung to but not bolted, and then looked meaningly at me. There was not a trace of doubt or hesitation in her eye. Her foot pressed down sharply on the accelerator and the car shot forward. The gates, as I have said, were massive. There was a shock that rocked us all in our seats, a sound of smashing glass and rending metal, a bellow of rage from the guard. The gates swung back and the car limped into the drive with broken lights, crumpled fenders and a remnant of the bumper cutting a groove in the gravel. Alice, I saw, was quite collected and had the car in hand perfectly.

The guard sprang to the running-board before we could get under way.

"Stop the car, damn you! Stop the car!" he ordered.

Julius Anchor, who sat on that side, replied with his invariable formula, only this time he accented it differently. "No, *suh*," said Julius. And, with a fist like a ham, he sent the angry custodian of the gates into a clump of shrubs.

But our troubles had only begun. A shrill whistle sounded from somewhere in the grounds and three men, appearing suddenly from the shrubbery, ran out on the drive a few yards ahead of us. Alice, however, was equal to the emergency. Before I had had time to think of what should be done she had swung the car sharply through an opening in the poplar trees that lined the drive. We scraped some bark off one of them and the next instant were bumping heavily over the grass.

"Great girl!" I cried. I take my solemn oath that few men could have handled matters as coolly or as unerringly as she did. She put the car into low and stepped down hard on the gas. The engine roared and we began to pick up speed and went smashing over shrubs and flower beds, leaving a trail of destruction in our wake. As soon as we had headed off pursuit with a safe margin, Alice ran us back through the line of trees and on to the drive again without slowing down. Getting into high, she settled the car to a steady humming gait.

"Grand work!" I applauded. Then, feeling apprehensive as to what this would mean to her, I said: "But, what is Marvin going to think?"

Alice looked around at me. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement and her eyes shone.

"Confound Marvin!" she said.

There was no one to stop us at the front door. We went in quietly and stood for a moment in the front hall, looking around. The house was curiously silent. It gave us all, I think, a feeling of complete desertion. Except for a shout far down the drive there was not a sound, not even the ticking of a clock.

"It can't be that every one is out," remarked Joel, uneasily. "At such a time—"

"Mr. Cross is downtown," said Alice.

"And he won't be back," explained Ab. "He agreed to meet us at 11:30 at the Trust offices."

"A block over we passed a trained nurse," I said. "It occurred to me that probably she belonged here and was out for a walk."

"There must be servants at the back," added Joel. "We had better go right up to Peter's bedroom."

We climbed the stairs on tiptoe, not because we feared interruption now but through some sense of strangeness which had affected all of us, I think. Alice walked beside me, her hand on the rail. It was her left hand; and she wore no ring of any kind!

It was with mixed emotions, therefore, that I stepped softly and cautiously up the stairs. A feeling of exultation, of certainty that she had answered Marvin's ultimatum by breaking their engagement, was mingled with a sense of extreme anxiety on Uncle Peter's behalf. Alice kept her gaze straight ahead.

Joel led the way to the bedroom. The door, we saw, was open.

MOTIONING us to wait, the old man went in alone, walking still on tiptoe. The room was in complete silence. There were no signs whatever of human occupancy. For a moment, Joel stood in the middle of the room in full view of us. Then he turned back and raised his hand for us to come. His face was ashen.

I entered first. The others followed, it seemed, reluctantly. I knew what had happened even before I saw the still figure on the bed. Uncle Peter was dead.

The sunlight streamed through the window and lay full across the bed. The calm features on the pillow were part in shadow and part in the unwelcome light. The raised shade was mute witness to the fact that there had been no ministering hand in the sick room for some time. Uncle Peter had died unattended and alone.

The end must have come but a few minutes earlier, however. There was nothing rigid in his position and his face had not yet fallen into the set lines of death. It might almost be said that he smiled. There was some relief for me in the thought that he had been able to carry his good spirits to the very end. If we could judge, standing on this side of the brink, Uncle Peter had met Death on a peaceful and dreamy road and kept pace pleasantly enough through the Valley of the Shadow.

Then I noticed that his arm was stretched out toward a small table at one side of the bed on which the bell was kept. Nothing could have brought home more poignantly the sadness of an unattended death bed. Uncle Peter had known, then, that the summons had come. He had tried to signal; or, perhaps, had signaled in vain.

By a sense of understanding that the moment belonged to my uncle's old companion, we fell back and left Joel alone by the side of the bed. After a moment he said softly:

"For so He giveth His beloved sleep."

It was a full minute before he spoke again.

"Peter depended on me. We were together at every turn of the road. I always hoped that I would be allowed to go first so I could meet him at the divide and see him safely through."

Then he turned and singled out Anchor, who was standing just within the door.

"Julius, it was not right that our old friend should have started on the long journey without one of us near to lend him good cheer."

And Julius, a tear coursing down each ebony cheek, answered simply: "No, suh."

Back in the hall we stopped for a moment and I asked Joel what there was for me to do.

"Nothing," he answered. "Everything is over now. Peter's death settles it all."

"You mean—"

"There will be explanations to make, of course," he said. "But with Peter gone there is no longer any situation, any problem. If you can get around to see me this evening, Grant, I shall be very glad to tell you the whole story."

Ab Betters, watch in hand, looked questioningly at Mr. Huckers.

"In half an hour we are due for that

conference with Cross. In the circumstances—"

"Send word to him at once. He must return here without delay. Perhaps you had better wait until he comes. I—I am going to spare myself the ordeal of seeing him. Don't say anything to him, Betters. Not yet. What about you, Grant? I suppose you will want to stay."

"Yes," I replied grimly. "I am going to stay now. I defy him to steal my place away from me again."

In the hall below two of the guards were waiting for us. They advanced blusteringly but Joel stopped them with a gesture.

"Mr. Huntley is dead," he said quietly. "No doubt the man who hired you will dispense with your services now. In the meantime we will not tolerate a sound from you in this house."

The pair, silenced and awkward, retreated through the door. Alice and the old man got into the car while I busied myself in front with the damaged bumper. As soon as it was removed I stepped around by Alice and shook her hand. I wanted to say many things but all I could manage was:

"You've been wonderful. I—I hope you know what I—think about it."

I WAS called to Chicago that afternoon on vitally important business; but I got back in time for the funeral. Marvin ignored me absolutely. But he gave Joel Huckers and Ab malignant and triumphant looks. And he spoke to them.

"Your time has come," he said. "My uncle made a final will, a few days ago. It leaves everything to me and names me as sole executor."

"So?" said Joel Huckers. "Marvin, you ought to be a successful crook. But—you are not. Your uncle's will is worthless."

"What are you trying to insinuate now?" Marvin flamed up. "I—"

"I insinuate nothing," said Joel. "I state a fact. Your uncle had nothing to leave."

Marvin managed a laugh. But somehow Ab Betters, who broke in just then, worried him more than Joel had done.

"Don't offer that will for probate until you have seen us, Cross," he said. "I speak for Mr. Huckers in saying that we will keep any appointment you care to make, at my office or at his house, to explain matters to you."

I was almost as much in the dark as Marvin himself. Some fantastic glimmer of an idea had come to me, but I had dismissed it as absurd.

"I want to get things settled!" said Marvin, defiantly. "You go on to Huckers's—I'll be over as soon as I can get away."

On the way to his house Joel Huckers sat in a queer, swaying silence. Ab looked at him once, and then away. And when we arrived it was Ab who told me the story—in cold, precise words. I suppose he had lived with it so long that it no longer seemed to him as amazing, as extraordinary, as it was.

He had to go back to a time very soon after I ran away from Severn. As I have said, Uncle Peter and Joel Huckers were, even then, becoming wealthy. But they were wholly different in their ideas, in spite of their friendship; Uncle Peter was all for great operations, while Joel was steady and quiet, content with smaller but certain profits. And finally, Ab said, they dissolved their partnership. Each had too many interests outside of the law, by that time; financially, of course, they had little in common.

Joel prospered. So, for a time, did my uncle—exceedingly. He built Huntley Court. Egged on by my Aunt Julia, he went from one extravagance to another; and for a time he made more than enough to warrant his expenditure.

There was no break, Ab said; they still shared offices. But each was in charge of his own affairs—although in investments, as distinguished from speculations, Joel practically dictated Uncle Peter's course.

And then the smash came. A brokerage firm with which Uncle Peter had had vast dealings failed in Chicago; its senior member, in fact, absconded. And by a piece of miserable luck the papers all printed, as a part of their story of the smash, the statement that one of the heaviest losers was a prominent lawyer in Severn. The story pointed unmistakably to Uncle Peter, though he wasn't named. And Joel came back from a trip, Ab said, to find a run on the Huntley Trust Company in full progress and Uncle Peter almost in a state of collapse.

"Mr. Huckers tried every way he could to work out a plan to save him," Ab said. "He was nearly crazy—I realized then how much one man may love another—the story of David and Jonathan seemed more real to me than it had ever done. Joel was ready to sell everything he had—but that wouldn't have been enough. It wouldn't have stopped the run. And—he did the only thing that would. He let it be believed that it was he, and not your uncle, who had failed. That did save the day.

"And, Grant—your uncle, once the strain was over, collapsed. He was very ill for a long time. And when he recovered he remembered nothing of his failure! He heard people talk of Joel's smash—and believed what he heard, and said at once that he would always care for him. Your aunt heard him—that's the origin of the story of the pension.

"My God! When I think of the truth of these years! I've known everything—so has Julius Anchor. No one else ever has. We've had to lie and scheme; to pay your uncle's income tax, for instance—and that wasn't easy. Joel has succeeded greatly, but keeping up Huntley Court has been a terrific expense—a great drain. And he has insisted, always, on making good every promise your uncle made in response to any charitable appeal. And your uncle had the most extraordinary illusions about his wealth—he believed he was a modern Crœsus! So Joel has never had much for himself."

Later, Joel added details. I could understand his dislike for Marvin. Marvin had always disliked him and poked fun at him. And he had had to get Marvin free of one expensive scrape after another—an entanglement with a woman, a nearly fatal accident, due to his reckless driving, a fight in which he had thrashed and badly hurt a servant. And there had been Mary—and Marvin's attentions to her, which Joel had stopped abruptly when it became clear to him that Marvin was simultaneously paying his court to Alice.

I knew it all when Marvin came—and, for the first time in my life, I was sorry for him. For Joel, at last, had turned very human. He meant to smash Marvin. He looked forward to telling Mary—who must, he said, have regarded him as a futile, doddering old man. It was Ab who let Marvin in, and he looked furious when he saw me.

"Ah! A council of war," he said shortly. He turned to Joel. "I've come to find out what you meant."

Joel had risen to his feet. He told me afterward, contritely, that when Marvin came in he could think of nothing but the manner in which my cousin had condemned Uncle Peter to a lonely death. His eye was filled with the picture of the sick man reaching vainly for the bell and the house all about him deserted and silent. Perhaps, also, there flashed across his mind the long succession of injuries and indignities he had suffered at Marvin's hands. He was holding his cane, a rather light one, fortunately. Before any one of us knew what he was about, he had raised it and slashed Marvin across the face.

"You—you—" he cried.

I rushed between them; but Marvin, to give him credit, behaved rather well. He neither moved nor spoke but stood there with his hand to his face. A red mark showed on his cheek from ear to chin; but I don't imagine there had been much strength behind the blow.

JOEL'S anger evaporated completely and left him shamefaced and apologetic.

"I'm sorry. This is the first time I have let my temper get the better of me in many years." He looked wonderingly at his cane and threw it to the floor behind him. "'The rod of mine anger.' Mr. Cross, I trust you will accept my apologies for this—this exhibition. On the part of an old man, immune to reprisal, it was doubly indefensible."

"Never mind that," said Marvin shortly. "I've come for an explanation."

"Please take a chair," said Joel.

Marvin sat down stiffly, placing his hat on the table beside him.

"Is it necessary for these—gentlemen to be present?" he asked.

"I think so," answered Joel. Then he questioned: "You have found the will?"

"It was drawn up and signed the day before Uncle died," answered Marvin. "I'll enter it for probate at once."

"May I ask the terms of the will?"

"You'll find out soon enough. But I don't mind telling you that I inherit the bulk of the estate, as was to be expected."

"Your right will never be contested," affirmed Joel, solemnly. "There is no estate."

And then, in as few words as possible, he told the story. Marvin's sallowness changed to pallor as the recital progressed, and the welt on his face stood out more sharply in consequence. He did not move once and made no effort to interrupt until the old man's voice trailed into silence.

"An ingenious conspiracy," he remarked; then, rising to his feet: "I'm not at all concerned about it. But I defy you to carry it any further."

"You had better sit down," said Joel gently. All the anger had left him. "I prefer to settle things quietly—for Peter's sake. And what is more, I am determined that nothing shall ever get out of what I have told you. Certainly you ought to prefer a settlement without publicity. The first thing to be done is to destroy the will."

"What proofs have you," demanded Marvin, "to back up this—this ridiculous story?"

"There is ample proof on every point. We kept, of course, all records bearing on Peter's transactions with the brokers. The books at the Trust office will show that your uncle's checks have always been drawn against funds provided by me. And, of course, I hold the deed to Huntley Court, which Peter insisted on making over to me before—his memory went."

"YOU own—Huntley Court!" cried Marvin, choking. I don't believe he had realized before the true significance of his position. He got up and went to the window and it was a long time before he could summon courage to face us again. "The Huntley millions!" I heard him mutter once.

Finally he walked back to the table and reached for his hat.

"I take it, then, that I am a beggar?"

Joel had been watching him closely. At this question he smiled and shook his head.

"No, it's not as bad as that," he answered. "I am responsible for the misapprehension you have been living under. I don't intend to cut you adrift. That wouldn't be fair. But we can talk of that again. At the moment—"

Just then Mary came into the room and her eyes lighted at once on Marvin's face. She uttered a cry of alarm: "What's the matter? You're hurt!"

"I struck him," said Joel, with abasement written in every line of him.

Mary looked in amazement at her guardian and then back at Marvin.

"I don't understand," she faltered. "Were you quarreling?"

"No," said Joel. "We hadn't quarreled. I gave way to a sudden burst of temper. Perhaps—perhaps you had better leave us for a while, Mary, my dear."

But Mary had no intention of doing that. She stepped up to Marvin and touched him on the arm. I caught her expression as she did so and what I saw made me feel very sorry for Joel Huckers.

"Come and let me attend to it," she said. "It needs bathing and some ointment at once."

Marvin followed her into the kitchen and when my eyes traveled back to Joel I was astonished at the change that had come over him. He had slumped back in his chair, and stark misery looked out of his eyes.

"Grant," he said, in a husky whisper, "did you see? She has never got over it!"

I nodded gravely. Mary had made no effort to conceal her feelings. Poor Ab had wandered over to the window and had turned his back to us.

"I heard a day or so ago that he was going to marry the Ford girl."

"The engagement has been broken," I replied.

That brought Ab around with a look of surprise on his face. Alice's action in breaking the engagement, which meant so much to me, was bad news for my companions.

"Then—it may happen after all," said Joel, more to himself than to me. "If Mary wants him, have I any right to interfere?"

He sat huddled up in his chair for several moments and then, rising without a word, hobbled off to the kitchen. It was fully ten minutes before he returned. He came back alone, shutting the door carefully after him.

"It is settled," he said.

He sat down and faced us with entire composure.

"Mary—bless her heart—is happy. She's wanted him all along and I'm afraid has been very miserable since I sent him away. They told me as soon as I went out and it was touching to see how radiant my little girl was. Marvin seemed happy, too. So I left them to themselves."

For a moment Ab and I found nothing to say. The same doubt was troubling us both, I am sure. Marvin's declaration followed too closely after the blasting of his hopes of a fortune, to ring entirely true. And there was the matter of his engagement to Alice to explain. Joel seemed to sense what was passing in our minds.

"He liked Mary a great deal from the very start," he said. "Don't you think we should—give him the benefit of the doubt?"

"Then you are giving your consent?" I asked.

"It seems to be my Mary's chance for happiness," he answered. "Yes, I have given them my blessing. And now, thank God, I am in a position to build safeguards around her. He will have to play the game—"

He stopped and remained plunged in thought. I watched him closely, feeling positive that I knew what he would say next. I was not able to detect any evidence of regret on his part, however, at the new course he must steer.

"This changes everything," he said finally. "It's going to be difficult—"

"If it is announced that Peter died without a will and you waive all rights, then Marvin automatically assumes control," he went on. "It will have to be made clear, though, that the estate fell far short of expectations—for we can't afford to continue that Huntley Court folly."

"Before this complication arose you were planning to give her the benefit of your wealth. How did you plan to do that without arousing suspicions?"

"It would have been necessary to do it gradually," he said, with an involuntary sigh. "Fortunately, a ready reason was at hand. A concern in Illinois in which I was interested, and which went smash soon after all this trouble started, was reorganized. Ever since it has been slowly coming back and now it is in a position to pay handsome returns. It could have been made to appear the reason for my—altered status."

"You will tell Mary the whole story now?"

He shook his head, a little slowly perhaps but none the less emphatically.

"She must never know," he declared.

"But—" I began.

"Do you want her to think that he didn't come to her until he knew he had nothing of his own and that she was an heiress?" he demanded. His tone suggested some disappointment that I had failed to grasp that phase of it. "As it is, she thinks he has come to her with his new gifts in his hands. Would you have me take that away from her? Besides, if we told her anything at all she would soon get the whole story. We can't shake her pride and faith in her husband."

"I suggested it because I remembered what you said—"

"We can't barter her happiness for my pride," he replied simply.

TO ME it seemed the completest kind of tragedy. Joel had won freedom only to be loaded down immediately with a new set of chains. But if he felt sorry for himself it was somewhere deep down under the surface where it did not show. The fact that Mary was happy seemed to him the all-important consideration.

"I shall make it clear to him"—I noticed that he had a distaste for calling my cousin by name; the personal dislike was still there—"that he must make Mary happy. I shall keep the whip-hand. Not a cent will be made over to him. I'll tell him that if I ever see a trace of worry or unhappiness on my little girl's face, I shall hold him responsible. Some means must be devised to carry things along on the same basis after I die. Yes, I can safeguard her happiness, and that is a most comforting thought—"

"Let me suggest," put in Ab, "that you get him a job. It's high time he started to work."

Joel acquiesced in that. He knew what was running in my mind, for he said: "I believe this is going to mean real happiness for me, Grant. I'm sure Peter has looked down today and approved. And now, my boy, about that inheritance of yours—"

I laughed. "You recall to my mind," I said, "an item of news I've intended to tell you all along. I'm rather by way of being a rich man myself. Perhaps you remember I told you that one man engaged in my line had made a couple of millions in the last few years? Well, it happens that I'm the man."

"My, but I'm glad to hear it!" cried Ab. And I don't believe his manner was ever quite the same to me after that. My friend Absalom Betters has a sincere and old-fashioned respect for wealth.

Joel reached out and shook my hand warmly and, I think, affectionately. "I was sure you had been successful," he said. "You carried none of the signs of failure about you, Grant."

I was frankly puzzled at Marvin's attitude during the next few minutes. He received our congratulations in quite the usual spirit, smiled, shook hands and seemed in every way the happy accepted lover. Even if I felt a lack of cordiality in the glance of his eye, I did not detect any trace of lurking resentment. He might be playing a clever part; but it seemed just possible that he had succeeded in closing a curtain in his mind and wiping out the past. As a matter of fact I have never been able to decide which it was. There has never been any evidence of hard feeling on his part in the two years that have passed since—but there has been no cordiality either.

It was very clear that Mary had achieved what her heart had been set on. She drew me aside and whispered:

"I wish you the best of luck, Grant."

"I'm on my way now to put it to the test," I answered. "Pray for me."

We shook hands again. Her eyes, I saw, were clear and untroubled. She whispered again: "You knew, of course, that Marvin's mother and uncle favored the idea of a match with Alice. So, you see, I am not jealous about—that—any more."

ON THE way over my thoughts somehow ran back to a night at a high-school dance when Marvin got ahead of me and asked to see Alice home. I could still picture her clearly as she had looked when she stamped her foot at me and exclaimed, "You're the *slowest* thing that ever lived, Grant McClay!"

It set me thinking hard. There had been times when she had preferred me to Marvin. I was sure of that now. Well, I would abjure my slowness once and for all. If a bold stroke could win her now, I must draw on my stores of that quality. I carefully rehearsed several speeches which had the necessary ring of audacity about them.

But when she met me in the hall, all my fine phrases deserted on the spot. I struggled for words and finally blurted out:

"Alice, you are going to marry me."

She came up close with a most serious face and slipped both hands into mine. For a moment we faced each other silently.

"Why, of course!" said Alice. And then she laughed.

"It's such a relief you've found out about it, Grant. I've known it myself for—oh, quite a long while."

In time, of course, I remembered that an explanation was due me. I demanded it sternly and, yes, anxiously. Why had she accepted Marvin?

"Well, you see—" began Alice. Her hand dropped from my shoulder and began slowly to roll and unroll the lapel of my coat. "I waited ten years—yes, *waited*—and then you came back on the very day when I had to give him a definite answer. It seemed like fate, Grant. But you were so unresponsive. I was afraid you didn't care after all and of course a girl must show a little pride. It seemed just possible, too, that if you cared at all, you would find it out if—"

"But I did speak," I contended.

"Yes, I know. But from the way you did it I thought you were just trying to save me from my fate. You waited until that blundering old dad of mine suggested it." She nestled her head still closer on my shoulder and laughed softly. "Grant, Grant! If you really loved me, why didn't you show a little ardor?"

"I did love you!" I declared. "And if it's ardor you want—"

It was quite a long time before either of us made any effort to renew the conversation. Then I told her of Marvin's engagement to Mary.

"I'm glad," said Alice, in a tone that dismissed the matter as one of comparatively small importance now.

Soon after that—at least I think it was soon—her father came out into the hall and remarked in a grieved tone: "Say, you two! The gong sounded ten minutes ago. Pardon me for mentioning a matter of purely selfish personal preference but cold soup never has appealed to me much."

Places had been set on three sides of the table but Alice promptly moved my plate over next to hers.

"No farther away than that," she said. Then she turned to Mr. Ford. "Well, Parent, I've hooked him at last."

"Do you mean to tell me," he exclaimed indignantly, "that you had your mind made up all along?"

"Well, practically," said Alice, her hand stealing into mine under the tablecloth. "At any rate, I never intended to marry Marvin. You've been waiting to hear me say that, haven't you, Grant?"

I had indeed.

"Well, I do think," grumbled her father, "that you might have tipped me off. It would have saved me a pile of worry."

"But then," said Alice, brightly, "you wouldn't have given Grant a shove, would you? The lengths we women have to go to sometimes!"

EPILOGUE

ALICE has just come in with something on her mind. We are here in Severn again and will probably stay with my father-in-law for some little time. We went to Montevideo and then to South Africa and finally took a pleasure trip through Europe. Wonderful times we have had. I have made a great discovery; the perfect wife actually exists—and I have her!

We intended to go to Brazil this fall to build a bridge but, after consideration, we decided it would be wiser to come here to Severn instead.

My Alice is wearing a remarkably pretty native thing she picked up in South America and has rolled herself up into a kind of fluffy ball on the couch. I think I have already alluded to that habit of hers.

"I suppose," she says, "you've made it appear that I chased after you from start to finish."

"I have not," I reply. "How could I without making myself out a donkey?"

"Well, you know, I did run after you, just as hard as ever I could. And you were rather stupid—at times. But this is what I came in to bother you about. I think you ought to tell how happy Mary and Marvin are."

"They do seem to be hitting it off."

"And you really ought to mention how well Marvin is getting on at the bank. And that he's just been elected chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. And how fond he is of the baby. Grant, it was too bad they named him Peter instead of Joel, wasn't it?"

'But, you know," I said, "we've agreed between us that we'll rectify that if it so happens—" A baleful light in my wife's eye stopped me in time. "Do you suppose she has ever learned the truth?"

"Mary is a clever woman," answered Alice. "Of course, she has found out. But it doesn't make any difference now."

"Why?"

"Well—just because. Now, here's another thing, Grant. That parent of mine deserves some mention, too. Can't you explain that he's managed to get Denver twice since we've been here? And I'm sure he would be the proudest man in the world if you were to mention that he's invented that thingabob that connects something or other with something else and gets a certain result—when it works."

"It shall be recorded," I declared, "in the exact terms you have employed."

"And are you sure you've changed all the names and the descriptions so that no one will recognize the story—except, perhaps, a few of the main characters?"

"It has been duly disguised," I reported. "But there was one name I hadn't the heart to change: Alice."

My wife rewarded me with a lovely smile for that. "I'm kind of glad," she said, "that I'm to appear under my own name. What did you call father?"

"Albert Sidney Ford."

"Oh, dear! I'm afraid he won't like that. He's never been south of St. Louis in his life and he owns an eight-cylinder car. But here's the main point I wanted to discuss with you, Young Chief Trying-to-Be-a-Novelist. Shouldn't you tell the remarkable things Mr. Huckers has been doing since, and what people think of him now?"

"No, for once, Mrs. McClay, I must disagree with you. I left him at the finest moment of his whole life. To add anything more would be an anticlimax. And I think it would spoil the picture I want to leave in the reader's mind."

"But, Grant, you were saying the other day that he now occupies a high place at the King's table—"

"Alice, blessings on you! When you came in I was sitting here with a mind as blank as the shield of Thor, trying to work out a title. Now you've given me one."

And I am going to turn back immediately and inscribe on the front page of my manuscript the title that my wife has put into my head: "The King's Table."

Everybody's Magazine, November, 1924

The White Flower

A Drama That Took Place in a Strange Home—a Story of Unusually Strong Appeal

By Margery Williams

WHEN the parents of Ulysses Washburn named him they had no thought of his possible spiritual qualities. They just named him after one of the best Americans they could think of, and let it go at that. They called him "Yewsless," and when he began to go to school the boys shortened it to "Less." Less's parents had no sense of humor, but a great deal of practical middle-class ambition. They wanted their son to grow up efficient and God-fearing, own a car and be respected in the community. Less had no definite ambitions. He liked to lie under the pine trees and dream.

There were pine trees out on the back lots when Less was a boy, but about the time he left school and started to work at the hardware store they were cut down, and a row of neat frame cottages rose in their place, painted yellow, with furnace heat and town water, and space at the side of each for a garage. The hardware store was a big efficient place. It had grown as the town grew, from the original rambling store that sold zinc pails and chicken feed and farming tools to a new glass-fronted building on Front Street, near the depot, with an assortment of everything from carpet tacks to cameras, and a smart upper floor where they sold furniture, framed oil-paintings and gramophones. The motto of the hardware store was "Service and Efficiency." Behind the long counter, and visible only to the assistants, were pasted neat attractive paragraphs, giving expert advice about clinching a sale, how to help the customer make up his mind, how to send a customer away satisfied even if what you have isn't just what he wants, varied by breezy inspiring business slogans, printed in large type to catch the listless eye:

> This Is Your Busy Day—Don't Waste the Other Fellow's Time—Are You the Man the Busy Customer Prefers? If Not, Why Not?

It seemed to be the ideal starting-point for Less.

But for some reason Less delayed in making the career he should. The slogans did not uplift nor inspire him. Perhaps he failed to grasp the hardware store in its true significance. In two years Burt Stevens, the red-headed, antagonistic assistant who had entered the store eight months later than Less, had been three times promoted, and he was already head of the downstairs department. There were rumors of partnership. And Less, whom every one liked, was still selling carpet tacks and trying to match brass screws to unaccommodating screw-holes. He was twenty-two now, overgrown and narrow-chested, inclined to stoop and subject to an irritating cough which started with the first raw days of December and lasted, with intervals, well into April. His mother blamed him bitterly for carelessness in the matter of flannels. He had lank brown hair that straggled over a forehead damp with his efforts to satisfy exacting customers, red bony wrists that stuck out from his gray underwear; the blue remote eyes of the ne'er-do-weel. His father said frequently that it was a pity Less didn't seem to get on better. What Less seemed to need was some kind of a—incentive was what he meant, but he got no nearer to it than "shake-up." Still, the idea was there.

About this time, it almost seemed that

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Less had found it. He fell in love with Amanda Stowbody, and five months later they were married. Less's parents liked Amanda. She was smart and practical; she seemed to be the right kind of girl to take hold of Less and instil that vague something which they felt was lacking.

Less liked her because she was dark and slender, and her hair had a queer ripple behind her ears. And she was the only girl in town who had ever taken notice of him. Amanda had been brought up by an aunt, who had trained her to do those things about the house for which she would ordinarily have to pay a non-relative thirty dollars a month and board. Under her guidance Amanda had become almost painfully efficient. In return the aunt had allowed her to complete her course at high school, and once gave her, in a moment of generosity, three dollars to buy wool for a sweater, not foreseeing that Amanda would choose orange. For it was that orange sweater, a bright flame against the dull November background, that, as much as Amanda's dark unexpected beauty and far more than her practical qualities, brought about Less's proposal.

THEY were married in March. On the family's advice they bought a house, a tiny three-room affair, which by working hard they might own entirely at the end of four years. Less, encouraged by Amanda, had had visions of leaving the town, getting a job somewhere else, of vaguely going West. But the family, father and mother and Amanda's aunt, were insistently experienced and wise. Less found himself tied to three rooms, with a pump in the back kitchen, a maple suite acquired on the three-year system, some woven rugs, Amanda's sewing-machine—and the hardware store.

The current opinion in the store, for a time, was that Less had really begun to take hold. He did his best to acquire that brisk intelligent manner desired of him. He was alert, smiling, jumped when he was spoken to, his hair was better brushed and his linen smarter. He worked hard all that spring and summer, doing overtime that the maple suite might be more speedily liquidated. If he had kept on, one felt, he might even have had that Ford in another two years.

Burt Stevens had a smart four-seater in which he drove his wife out on Sundays. He had saved money, and spoke of starting an automobile business for himself. He left the hardware store and another Burt Stevens succeeded him, not red-haired this time, but equally brisk and efficient, and in two more years he also had risen over Less's head. For it became daily clearer, in spite of that creditable spurt, that Less was not the one the hypothetical busy customer of the slogan preferred. His position, in that stronghold of modern methods, became more and more one of good-natured tolerance.

When business became slacker, during the winter, there was talk of reducing the staff. Less, out of consideration for six years' service, was not among the discharged. Instead he was transferred to the feed department, which still existed as auxiliary to the hardware and furniture and gramophones. Hay and oats and chicken-feed are among the primitive demands of life; they do not call for expert salesmanship.

THE feed department was in an old building at the rear. It was badly heated, the furnace serving only the main building, and the doors didn't close properly. Less escaped the fussy women who wanted a lid to fit a saucepan bought two years before in another township, five-cent boxes of tacks, and potato parers like those they'd seen advertised, that the handles didn't come off. But he missed also the cheerful social life of the store, the men's stories, the smell of varnish and linoleum and the voice of the gramophone on the upper floor. His circulation was poor and he developed chilblains, which refused stubbornly to heal. There is a suggestion of inferiority about broken chilblains. Less worried a good deal about his hands.

He worried less about his cough, perhaps because he was used to it. Amanda did that: it kept her awake at night. Less thought perhaps all that hay-dust in the store sort of irritated it. She bothered him to go to the doctor, but he was obstinate, with the peevishness that had overtaken him of late. He never got time to stop in at the doctor's office at midday, and of an evening he was too tired. When he did go, driven by her insistence, the doctor was at once cheerful and admonitory. Less must eat well, build up his strength.

Everybody's Magazine, November, 1924

Plenty of milk and fresh eggs. And fresh air—all the fresh air he could get.

"FRESH air!" said Less. "I guess if *he* was round that feed-store for one day he'd get all the fresh air that's coming to him!"

It was not until late in March that he got that really bad cold. He had been laid up more or less all winter, with day and half-day absences; nearly a week once, without pay, when he strained his side shifting a hay-bale. The hardware people were considerate; they felt that it would be better all around if Less took a really long time off; time enough to get thoroughly back into shape again.

Amanda oiled her sewing-machine and walked two miles to the nearest branch factory of Stine and Gottschling, makers of shirts and underwear. Thereafter the small living-room was heavy with the smell of new flannelette, pink and gray and blue-striped in cut-out stacks, and Amanda sat and stitched while Less, in the bedroom, with the door open between for warmth, fumed and worried.

It was fairly good pay. Amanda would have earned more at the factory but she could not leave Less. His peevishness had settled into a nervous dependence. He worried about everything: the back door, the kitchen stove-pipe, whether the coals were going to last out. He worried about Amanda working.

"If I could get back next week," he would say, "I believe they'd take me on again. It's eight years I've been working for them now."

It was. They had been married five. The house was paid for now, except eighty dollars they still owed on it to Less's father. But there were taxes, the gas bill, their daily living. Amanda's energy centered in her work; she folded, turned and stitched like an automaton.

One morning Amanda had finished her pile of garments for the day. She had meant to walk over for more before the factory closed, but Less had been unusually dependent and exacting; he had dropped at last into a tired sleep, and Amanda closed the bedroom door that the noise of raking the stove might not disturb him. It was still chilly within doors, but outside there was already a stir of spring in the air.

Young Wilson from the hardware store stopped in that evening, as he sometimes did, to ask after Less.

The fire had blazed up afresh, and they were waiting for the cup of coffee that Amanda had set back over the fire to become hot.

"It's too bad about Less," young Wilson said. "We all miss him, down there. It was a darn shame, shifting him off there to the feed store. Less never got any show. There's that new chap, that no one round the place can stand, and he's getting the salary right now that Less ought to have had four years ago.

"Tell you what it is," he continued, "Less never ought to have been stuck in a store. He's not that kind. He'd oughter be doing something different, for himself. Less is a mighty fine fellow!"

AMANDA stirred uneasily. Her flush of comfort at his first words changed to a vague disquietude. She *had* always appreciated Less. Only it was a pity, somehow, that he hadn't got on.

"When he gets to talking sometimes," young Wilson said, "he thinks out the queerest things. I guess he's told you about that dream he used to have, about the pine tree and diggin' for treasure, and how he found the place. Like one of these stories. . . . I always thought it was the darnedest thing, the way he'd tell it."

"I guess so . . . I don't just remember." Amanda shielded her face from the blaze. She felt the sudden shock that comes to a woman when an outsider tells her things about her husband that she doesn't know—not ugly things, but just the intimate beautiful things that she should have found out for herself. "I believe he did, once."

It was long enough ago, if he had; as far back as the days when she wore that orange sweater.

"It was after he got back from that trip with the Davis boys," Wilson was saying. "The summer you were first engaged, I guess it was. You remember how fine Less was feeling, when he got back! Just all keyed up and full of go; I'd never seen him quite that way before. I always thought that trip must have done an awful lot for him. Say!" He paused. The coffee in the pot bubbled over. As Wilson took his cup he said: "He don't seem to get any better, does he?"

"He won't." Amanda spoke sharply out of her loneliness. "I saw the doctor yesterday. He seems to think he'll be doing well if he keeps on the way he is. Less doesn't know it."

"IT'S a darn shame!" said young Wilson again, not knowing what else to say.

"It's more than that." Amanda faced him across the stove, her hands stretched to the warmth, her thin work-sharpened face ablaze. "You're right when you say Less never ought to have been in the store. I've known that. It wasn't his sort of job. I don't know much about business, I don't know what he's told you himself, but I do know that store has just been eating him, body and soul, all these years. It's just eaten him out. And now here's the finish of it."

She looked round the little room, grown ugly to her, its four walls the walls of a prison.

"We always thought, somehow, that maybe you'd go off and start in somewhere else, when you married."

"I don't know why we didn't. It was Less's people, I guess." Amanda spoke bitterly, glad to shift a part of the blame. "They seemed to think he'd got such a fine start here. And we'd bought the house. I suppose it would have seemed kind of foolish to go off to a strange place."

Would it? Long after young Wilson had left she sat there, staring into the stove. Suppose they had gone—set off somewhere, moved West. It was no good thinking about that now. Less, in the other room, moved uneasily. She rose, listened at the door, came back. What was it Wilson had said about that dream? Something about a pine tree. Five years ago, it must have been. Queer how a thing like that should stay in any one's mind all that while. She wished she had asked young Wilson more about it. But it was not until some days later, seeing through the window the crooked twist of a bough in their neighbor's garden that the dream came into her mind again.

"Less," she asked, "what was that queer dream you said you had once? Something about a pine tree and some treasure, wasn't it?"

He turned his big restless eyes on her. "Did I tell you? I don't remember that I ever did."

"You must have done, or I wouldn't have thought of it." Amanda's voice had a trace of impatience; she wasn't going to explain about young Wilson.

"Why, I guess it was just foolishness. Only you know how it is with dreams, when you dream the same thing over an' over—they sort of stick in your mind." He hesitated, shifted a little in the bed. She knew he did want to tell her; there was just that little apologetic eagerness in his voice, tired as it was. "Ever since I was a kid I used to have that same dream. It came so many times I gave it a name—the pine-tree dream."

LESS went on after a moment. "I'd be going up a hill. There was a kind of path, always the same path it was, with woods on one side, and right at the top there was a big old pine tree, standing by itself. And I get to the top, and right under this pine tree there's a place where I know there's some sort of treasure buried, and I've got to dig. And I start digging there, and I dig and dig . . . and sometimes when I dream it seems quite easy and other times it seems as if my arm was terrible heavy—you know how it is in a dream when you feel as if you can't hardly move them?"

Amanda nodded.

"Well, they feel just that way, and there's the sun coming down on my head through the pine boughs, and all the time I know the treasure's there, and there's only a little time to get it in, and then just as I reach for it the whole thing changes, and I catch hold of something—and it's a little white flower I've got in my hand."

"And then?"

"Why, I guess I wake up. Sometimes I wake up before. Once I only got as far as the pine. But if I do get there it always ends like that."

Amanda felt an unreasoning disappointment. She said: "Oh, well, I guess dreams always do end that way!"

"But—say, Amanda!"

"What?"

He watched her straightening the little crochet mats on the bureau.

"I know it's just foolishness. But don't

Everybody's Magazine, November, 1924

you suppose, if one goes on dreaming a thing like that, over and over, maybe there might be something to it?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I'll tell you. There was an awful funny thing happened once. You know that time I spent two weeks up-state with the Davis boys—maybe you wouldn't remember. It was the summer before. Anyway I was up there, and we used to spend a lot of time tramping round. I tell you, Amanda, I never saw any place so fine as that was. . . . And one day we were walking, and all of a sudden I had a funny feeling I'd been there before. . . . And I looked up, and there was the place I'd been dreaming about, all the time." Less raised himself on the pillows. "There was the pine tree, and the sky all blue back of it, and the little path going up the hill, and the woods and everything just the way I'd always seen it. I knew every inch! I knew the way the mosses grew on the stones, little green mosses with red cups to them. I knew there was going to be a big flat stone near the top of the hill where the path turns. And there was a flat stone, right there."

He paused, still watching her with those shadowy restless eyes.

"SAY, Amanda, I—I guess it sounds all foolishness to you. I wouldn't ever have told you if you hadn't brought it up. But I'd think it out, sometimes, over there in the store. I'd think, suppose there was something there, all the time. It wasn't so far from the coast, and those old fellows did bury stuff. I've read about it. The idea would sort of grow on me. I'd think, here am I working in this darned old hole all day, and nothing put by for you in case anything ever did happen, and maybe all the while—"

"Oh, Less!"

A great pity swept her for him, thin and helpless there in the bed. She put her arms round him, drawing him against her young strong shoulder.

"Why, Less, you never told me!"

"What was the good! I was tied up there. I always meant to go back, if I ever had the chance. And then this darn illness—Amanda!" He took her hand between his own, staring down at the roughened palm. "I guess I'm an awful poor fish. But I did mean to do something better for you. I meant you to have some sort of a time when we married. Honest, I did. I was always going to start in. And then after a while this thing sort of got on my mind. I'd keep right on thinking about it when I'd ought to be thinking of other things. All this winter, while I've been sick—" He paused. "Amanda, suppose I did get better, and we could pay things off and have a little by and I took a fortnight this summer; we might go up there. It just seems I've got to know what's under that pine tree, before I check in. Even if there wasn't anything—"

Of course there wasn't. There couldn't be. Amanda's sharp work-trained mind dealt with facts, ruthlessly separating the real from the unreal. But she couldn't tell Less. To Less the whole thing was real; he had dwelt so long in the fabric of his dream that it had become more actual than the things about him, his daily life, even the store where he spent those long monotonous hours. Through the plate-glass windows, across saucepans and gardening tools he had seen, she realized now, not Front Street with its loitering shoppers, its soda-water signs and cars, but the vision of his pine tree, mystic against the blue sky, guardian of the shining portals of adventure.

There was nothing of the dreamer about Amanda. Her aunt had seen to that. In a dispassionate, businesslike way that night she went over the whole situation. Ten weeks of working for Stine and Gottschling had taught her market values. She was able to earn her own living. Without Less to provide for, it would be even simpler. She was still young and there was no need to plan beyond the immediate future. If Less died, she could very well support herself.

TWO days later she went to a lawyer in the town and succeeded in raising a mortgage of three hundred dollars on their house. Less had to sign the document, but she did not tell him what the money was for. When he put his signature to the paper a smile twisted his mouth.

"Useless!" he said. "I guess that's about my number!"

It was late April when Less first told her of his pine-tree dream. In May they were up in the little village where Less had spent that magic fortnight, six years ago.

Their departure had been something in the nature of a flight. To Amanda it was a flight; a flight from the hardware store, from Stine and Gottschling, from everything that Less had hated, that had gone to bring the last two years of their married life so near disaster. Less's illness might have overtaken him anywhere, but it was the circumstance of it, all the miserable little things hedging them in, that had made it unendurable. She had seemed to see, in a flash of insight, the woman she was in danger of becoming, drudging, sharp-tongued, self-pitying, losing sight of her lover in the ailing husband; or else resigned, drab, just keeping on, waiting for the miserable end. There had been little beauty, no leisure, in their life. Less, for the brief time remaining to him, should have both. She could not give him those years over again, but she would give him what she could, let him set out on his voyage, if he must, with at least one wholly happy memory.

On their first morning, when she brought his cup of coffee up to the little attic bedroom they had rented, Less, shaken with coughing, smiled at her across the drawn bedclothes.

"Well, I guess I'm going to find that tree again, before I give in!"

"Why, sure, Less! We'll set out today," she told him. But it was many days before he was able to do more than cross the yard to the bench under the twisted apple tree and sit there, watching the road.

"We'll go tomorrow," he said. And then: "I guess maybe in a day or two. . . . "

WHEN he did get about, to the turn of the road at first, then every day a little farther afield, it seemed that the finding of that tree was not the easy task Less had imagined. Speaking of it, he had always been so clear in his mind where it stood, just which road and which turn had led to it; now there were a hundred possible ways and not one, it seemed, was exactly the path that Less remembered. Every day when they started on their walk he was full of confidence; he thought they should have taken the right yesterday, not the left; they should have skirted this wood, turned by that field-path. And every day their search ended with the same pauses, hesitations, some landmark that Less didn't "seem to remember," some turning that led them where it shouldn't; Less perplexed, with drawn brows, peering doubtfully this way and that, Amanda patient, cheerful, outwardly optimistic, in her own mind more and more certain that this dream tree of their quest existed only in her husband's mind.

And yet it was only the tree, Amanda felt—that vision, strengthened by long brooding during days and nights of illness, so clear and vivid in his mind, that kept Less up during those days of spring wandering, that lured his steps on and stood between him and the consciousness of physical fatigue. Gradually, under the gift of fresh air and blue open skies, his depression left him; each day brought a change, he became more and more his old self, till there came a morning when even Amanda, who had for so many weeks resolutely schooled herself against illusion, said at last: "Less is going to get better."

BY JUNE the pine tree, to which at first his mind had so desperately clung, had receded into the dim background of imagined things. It was as though, its mission accomplished, it had vanished definitely into the dream world from whence it came. If they spoke of it now at all it was in jest, as one should speak of El Dorado or the mountains of the moon.

Other things too had receded. Less was not going back to the hardware store. There had been letters from his parents, reminders of the promised place kept open for him in the fall. But Amanda, the risk once taken, set her mind definitely against return. She had the whole plan settled long before Less, on whom the shadow of that return had hovered like a bad dream, could bring himself to realize that there might after all be a way out. There was a little two-roomed house in the village which they could rent for six dollars a month. The brother of the woman with whom they lodged, who owned the sawmill at the turn of the road, could find enough light work for Less during the fall and early winter to enable them, with the remainder of the three hundred dollars, to pay their way until he could get a better job in the spring.

Over that little cottage, weather-worn and with tattered wall-paper, Amanda planned as she had never planned for their early home. This was theirs; their own choice. No one had a hand in it. She saw just how many rolls of new paper would make the front room habitable, where whitewash was needed, how the bricked-up fireplace could be restored. She saw the possibility, under the knee-deep weeds of two years' neglect, of their garden next spring; the old shed that could be turned into a chicken-house. To her vision already this little square of ground, the house with its peeling shingles, yielded the blossom of a happiness that would more than make up for the years they had missed.

One day they turned the key in the small front door with a sense, for the first time, of definite possession, and left the main road to walk through the woods. Next week Less would begin his job at the mill. Fall had set in; there was a smell of wood-smoke and decaying leaves in the air. The sun slanted in their faces as they walked.

"Look at that pine tree," Less said. "It's just the color of the new front of Joe's barber-shop, back on Central Avenue. I suppose now they're just getting busy with the fall stock of oil heaters and weather stripping. I tell you, Amanda, when I think of the years I spent in that darn store it's like a dream. It makes me feel I never want to see a carpet tack or a can-opener again. If I'd stayed there any longer I'd have gone crazy in the head. All those weeks I was sick—" He put his arm round her shoulder. "Amanda, you were awful good to me. I guess you must have thought I was crazy sometimes. I'd just got to the point where it seemed only some sort of a miracle would ever pull us through. . . . Tell me, Amanda, honest—you did think I was talking foolishness about that tree, didn't you?"

She hesitated. "Why, Less, it—seemed kind of queer!"

He stood looking at her.

"And yet you brought me all the way up here just because of it?"

"I—had to." She couldn't tell him yet the real reason; how near to the edge he had been. "You ought to be grateful to that old tree, Less! Anyway, it brought us up here, even if we never found it."

He caught her in his arms. "I guess I won't forget it."

The sun was nearly level now through the tree trunks. Neither of them had noticed the road they were taking, an old lumber-track, repaired here and there in marshy places with rotting logs between which black water oozed underfoot. Suddenly Less stopped, catching at her hand. "Amanda, look!"

The track divided. To the right a little path led upward to a clearing on the hillside. There, tall, solitary, spreading vast branches against the evening sky, stood the pine.

BREATHLESS, his face lit with excitement, Less dragged her up the little path, past swaying masses of goldenrod, past the flat remembered stone where red-cupped mosses grew, till they stood under the shadow of the wide-flung boughs.

"You see, it was here after all! I didn't just dream it. It was here all the time!"

He pulled her down beside him on the brown pine needles. Slowly the sun slipped down behind them; below there in the hollow a mist was rising, but here warmth still lingered, after-heat of the sunset, a living breath, it almost seemed, deep and fragrant, of the tree itself, a sense of sheltering arms about them.

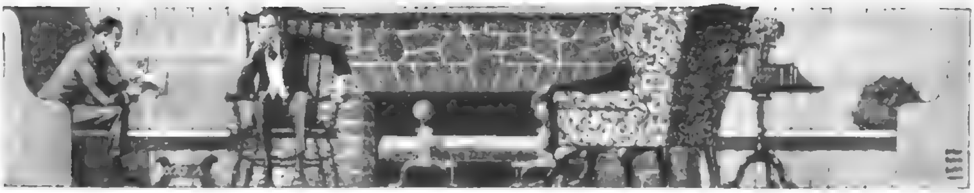
"You see," Less said presently, "it wasn't only the tree. I guess any old tree would have done to dream about. But it just seemed to stand for something—something big, something I'd always wanted and never got hold of. All that about the treasure was nothing but foolishness. And I guess we don't need to dig for any treasure, even if it was there. . . . But the rest of it—it did mean something. Well. . . . I guess we found it, all right!"

He looked up through the dark branches that curved above them. Life—that was it; freedom—big spaces.

"Come on," said Amanda. "We've got to go back. Will you remember the way, Less, another time?"

"Remember? I couldn't forget it, now!"

Reluctantly he shifted his position on the soft woven needles. As he put his hand to the ground it touched something, cool, fresh, tiny. Amanda, her face turned to the path, was thinking already of the cottage. He drew his hand gently away. There on the ground, pale and gleaming, set like a star in its coronal of pointed leaves, was a tiny white flower.



Everybody's Chimney Corner

Where Reader, Author and Editor Gather to Talk Things Over

WITH this number EVERYBODY'S is glad to introduce to its readers a versatile new writer with his second novel, a story with a detective of a most unusual order ("The Doctor Disagrees," page 9). Here is the author's bird's-eye view of himself:

Born February 18, 1897, in New York City. Graduated Ethical Culture High School, New York City, and Columbia School of Journalism (1920). Reviewed books and wrote feature stories at space rates for *Tribune* and *Evening Post*. Worked in "Information Bureau" (corporation name for Press Department) of a foodstuffs wholesaler in Wall Street for about half a year. Served a year in Signal Corps during the war. Never heard a gun fired except by accident.

Applied to musical bureau for job as secretary to a famous musician who was touring the country. Drew a press job instead.

Did "Our Little Girl," published 1923. Reviews compared author with Thackeray, Bennett, Lewis, Samuel Butler, Scott Fitzgerald, George Moore, and Edna Ferber, but not inevitably favorably. Also published in England. Don't know why.

As for "The Doctor Disagrees," I wrote it because I've always wanted to do something with a detective in it. I don't expect it to sear, devastate, uplift, grip or unhinge any of your readers, but if some of them have a good time reading it, it'll be okeh with me.

GIVE us football for drama and thrills! Jonathan Brooks ("His Son's Dad," page 47) writes a stirring story of the game as it was and is, on the basis of long personal experience.

I put in about a dozen years playing football [he says], a second dozen writing about it, and I hope to have the next dozen full of football as played by my boy. The first dozen years were the hardest; as for instance when the Riverside Royals, for whom I played as half-back, tackled the Avondale Tigers. Clarence Baldwin, captain and full-back of our team, owned a regular leather football, with a bladder and leather lacing. But the Tigers were not used to playing with a ball, so we compromised. Played one half with our ball and one half with a brick! It was rough, too, in University, where, being about half-size, I had to put in most of my time on the scrubs. But it is a great game.

I've been a newspaper man in Indiana, New York and Washington, a college professor once or twice, and now put in my time writing magazine fiction. Live in Indianapolis, have three youngsters, and besides a typewriter, run an automobile and lawn mower. My wife says if I worked as hard running the typewriter and the mower as I do running the car, we'd all get along a lot better. But she always seems willing enough to travel in the car with me, especially when I'm driving it to Louisville, Latonia, or other Kentucky points to see the ponies that Sam Carson writes about.

FRANCES R. STERRETT is known more as a novelist. In returning to the short story ("A Rich Man's Son," page 107) she presents an ingenious remedy for thoughtless law-breaking. She confesses to a life poverty-stricken in adventure:

Every one has a right to a few adventures but although I have trailed the thrilling moment from the Pacific to the Atlantic, the Caribbean to the Arctic with a look-see into Arctic Siberia, my Scotch Presbyterian ancestors force me to confess the humiliating truth that the adventure always happened to the other fellow. When I actually did have a thrilling moment in a French train on the way from Lausanne to Paris I ran home and wrote a book about it. That was my first novel, "The Jam Girl," and while I have written eight others I had to do them with only my imagination and my faithful typewriter to help me. But I am not discouraged. One never should be discouraged when tomorrow is just around the corner and trains are leaving every hour for somewhere. Honestly, is there anything more interesting than a railroad ticket?

OCTAVUS ROY COHEN has long been engaged on popular negro stories. But the editor has not seen a better story from Mr. Cohen's pen than "Interlude" (page 59), which is of an entirely different type.

Frances R. Sterrett ("A Rich Man's Son," page 107), once an artist, long has been laying on her colors with a typewriter.

Robert A. Simon, with a highly successful first novel, now creates a definitely new type of detective ("The Doctor Disagrees," page 9).

Frankly [he writes] I enjoy writing stories of the "Interlude" type. Perhaps that is because for more than six years I have been turning out humorous negro yarns—and am therefore known exclusively as a writer of negro stories.

Perhaps, also, my desire to write of my own sort is not unnatural. Once in a while I get away from negro stuff—and I experience the same mental kick that comes to me when I start out on a vacation. Not that I don't enjoy writing the negro stories—but then the serious yarns are so utterly different as to give me a real writing rest.

There isn't so much of interest to be said of myself. Age, 33, one wife, one child, one collie dog, one saxophone. I live in Birmingham, Alabama—in which city there is gradually forging to the front a group of young writers. Some of them have already made their mark—Edgar Valentine Smith, for instance; Jack Bethea, who, I believe, is soon to have a novel in EVERYBODY'S; Artemus Calloway, whose stories of animal life are familiar to readers of this magazine. They're all publishing stories—and they're all good friends of mine; which makes Birmingham a pretty cheerful place for me to live in.

ANOTHER new writer in the pages of EVERYBODY'S, Laurie York Erskine, contributes a romance of the new West ("Pictures," page 28). He introduces himself modestly in the third person.

Laurie York Erskine is thirty years old; and he feels that he is ready to write. At fourteen he left the Choir School of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and decided to be a writer because it wasn't possible for him to continue in school, but they made him an office boy. At sixteen he decided to be a a writer because he fell in love and at the same time lost his job. But they found him another job as junior assistant shipping clerk with an oil merchant near the East River docks, where he wallowed in oil, and grease, and paint, and

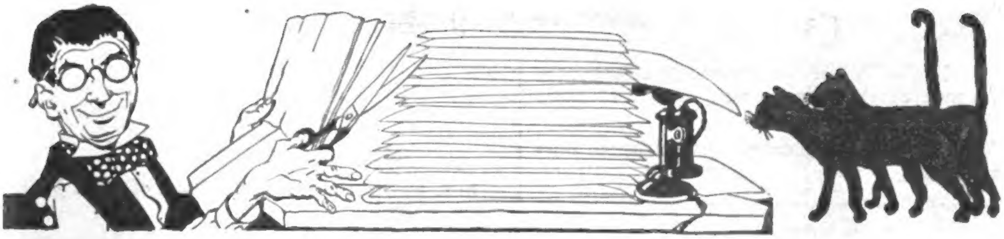
This sort of thing continued, bringing into his life a sort of hilarious monotony of failures, and a brightly woven tapestry of experience. At nine-lamp-black, and benzine. He didn't like it, so he decided again to be a writer.
teen he decided to be a writer because he couldn't get a job with his friends of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. At twenty he decided to be a writer because he austerely judged an actor's life to be no life for a man. At twenty-two he was convinced that experience had richly endowed him for the writer's craft because he gained a commission with the Royal Flying Corps and went over to the Great War to know what death and high adventure were in grim reality.

However, he never did take up writing, because the things he wrote turned out to be pale ghosts of something somebody else had written; and while those somebodies had always been Stevensons and Conrads and Masefields and Kiplings, still they didn't come out well as ghosts. It was not until he tried to sell bonds to the editor of the *American Boy* that he stopped playing about with that sort of thing, and remembering men he had met in war time and with the Mounted Police, and in out-of-the-way niches of the West, he sat himself down with a fountain pen and, having thought out a story about such men, wrote it down in the simplest language that came to his mind. It sold immediately, and Mr. Erskine has ever since been able to sell somewhere everything he has written. His record was finally made absolutely clear when he received a check for two dollars and seventeen cents from a Hungarian publisher (who bought it in billions of sesterces or something) for the serial rights of a story which no editor of any English-speaking periodical would have at any price whatever.

The story published herein was written as an attempt to bear out a favorite predilection of the author's mind: that a Western story need not insult the intelligence of the reader, nor debauch the magazine that prints it.

Photo by C. Smith Gardner.

In "Interlude" (page 59) **Octavus Roy Cohen**, famous for his negro stories, presents a good story of sentiment.



Prose *and* Worse, *by* Gridley Adams

DO YOU BELIEVE IN SIGNS?

In Hartford, Conn.: "*Dr. M. D. Liftig, Dentist.*" (He oughter move to Yankton, S. D.)
In Washington, D. C.: "*Daly & Knightly, Plumbers.*" "*Newcorn & Green, Tailors.*" "*Wolf, Furrier.*" "*Max Needle & Co., Tailors.*" (MRS. F. S. L.)
In Williamsport, Penn.: "*Hunt, the Plumber. Plumber & Steamfitter. Opposite the Jail.*" (He probably just leaked out.) (B. I. K.)
Once in Pittsfield, Mass.: "*O. B. Joyful.*"
In Seattle, Wash.: "*Stone, the Tailor.*" (I would have liked to mine, many times.) "*Klinker Middleton Coal Company.*" (Explaining in advance.) "*J. H. Shack, Architect.*" (MISS E. F. W.)
In Tampa, Fla.: "*K. K. Eyehoner, Optometrist.*" (W. N. P. D.)
In Los Angeles: "*R. E. Job, General Contractor.*" (E. D. Y.)

(Chicago Evening Journal)

The marriage of Miss Margaret M. Jones, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur B. Jones, will take place at 8.30 P.M. in the family residence. Dr. David H. Jones will officiate. S. Raymond Thornburg will act as best man. Miss Florence K. Jones will be the maid of honor and Miss Alice Anne Jones the flower-girl.

The reward for a bridegroom will be announced later.

(Stevens Point, Wis., Journal)

When arrested, Kels was in a railway car with a muzzle of a rifle in his mouth, attempting to pull the trigger with his nose.

Just bound to *blow* his head off, wasn't he?

(Marion Leader-Tribune)

Attorney Oren Dickey gave an interesting address at the Lions Club meeting yesterday on the Constitution of the United States. The first part of the meeting was devoted to a good time.

Oren must have been a scream.

(Peru, Ind., Journal)

FOR SALE—COLLIE PUPS, LARD PRESS, sausage-grinder, churn. 456 East Adams Ave.

"Weenie! Weedi! Weeci!" as Cæsar once murmured, smacking his rouged and penciled eyebrows.

(Benton, Mich., Evening News)

Every day that passes now is one day closer to Winter, which is drawing nearer.

Ain't it the truth?

(Omaha Bee)

She is stopping with Mr. and Mrs. Chris Melcher, with whom she formerly lived. The Melchers are relatives by marriage.

Often the case with man and wife.

(Murphy Varnish ad in Sat. Eve. Post)

"What Is a Professional Painter's Finish Worth?"

***I* know one I'd bump off for a quarter.**

(Ad of Evansville, Ind., store)

"14 Bars of —— Soap for One Dollar. Limited to one dozen to a customer."

Marcelle, stand close behind me, and p'r'aps we can swipe the other two.

(Pittsfield, Ill., Pike County Times)

The second grade of the East School are having a contest for the cleanest person in the room and many of the pupils already are nearly 100 per cent clean.

Johnny, just look at your hands; I told you to keep them off your neck.

Copyright, 1924, by Gridley Adams.

(*Arthur Brisbane in Chicago American*)

As men develop brain-power, their arms grow shorter.

Well, I haven't noticed any armless men lately.

(*Dixon, Ill., Telegraph*)

NOTICE—I wish the public to know that Nora Shoemaker, whose name appeared signed Mrs. Norman Brogan, in the card of thanks for the late George Shoemaker, is not my wife.—N. BEROGAN.

NOTICE—I wish to contract the statement that I was not N. Berogan's wife. Also the party is known and resides in Dixon that signed his name.—MRS. N. BRAGON.

Boy, get me a copy of "The LAST of the Brogans," by Fenny Cooper.

(*Ashland, Wis., Daily Press*)

TO THE PUBLIC

In regard to the notice in the *Daily Press* signed by C. L. Hotchkiss, in which he advises the merchants not to give me credit on his name, will say that I never intend to try and get anything on his name, and if I did I would find his name wasn't good for 30 cents.—MRS. C. L. HOTCHKISS.

There's a hotch comeback for you.

(*Kenosha News*)

Born to Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ott, an infant.

You know, sometimes, I don't think we'll have any real fall weather.

(*Sign on Missouri State Highway*)

DANGEROUS CURVE
DRIVE SLOW
Steele Undertaking Co.

No, thanks, I'll stop on the way back.

(*Bloomington Pantagraph*)

Two of Dr. Goodspeed's associates in the University of Chicago, Ernest Dewitt Burton and Shailer Mathews, in 1907 wrote a "Life of Christ," with a condensed commentary, as an aid to the historical study of Jesus. Commenting on the narrative of the woman taken in adultery, Messrs. Burton and Mathews say:

Rugs for storage should be rolled rather than folded. This gets moths too dizzy to eat.

Whitewash the walls and ceiling of your cellar and the coal may be found more easily.

(MISS S. B. E.)

Why, Shailer Mathews!

(*Georgetown, Ky., Times*)

Miss Mattie Lee Hill returned home Wednesday on account of being sick of mumps.

I don't blame you a bit, Mattie, old girl; I would be, too!

(*Sign in Watseka*)

M. E. CHURCH
Next Sunday, 7 P.M.
Illustrated Lecture
BREAKING CHINA'S WALL

Boy, go out and get me a book of Mah Jong rules; quick!

(*Morris, Ill., Herald*)

We are a great deal worse off than any but our own class will admit, but fellow farmers remember the words of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, so often quoted by Abraham Lincoln, "This too will pass."

And so Ella, as a child, must have been somewhat *backward*.

(*Westerville, Ohio, American*)

Up in Michigan a brewery was bought by a church society and used for religious services. The church increased its membership 300 per cent while the people worshiped in the old brewery building and a new edifice was built.

Three hundred per cent? No wonder they hung 'round.

(*Galena, Ill., Gazette*)

The stork visited the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur Wurm and left a baby girl.

(B. L. W.)

There's that "early bird" again.

(*Crown Point, Ind., Register*)

The beautiful night with the calm warm autumn atmosphere gave to the itinary of the occasion, which beckoned through the radio of meters carrying the message which resulted attendance as far north as Chicago.

Boy, open the window and let a little air in.

(*Quincy, Ill., Whig-Journal*)

Miss Pauline Loos and Carl H. Slack were quietly married Tuesday evening.

Where the parson tied a *real* knot.

(*Theater ad in Malvern, Idaho*)

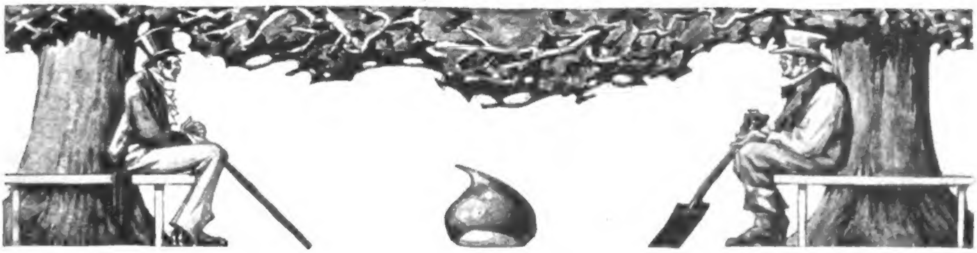
We have installed new veneers on our seats and you will have no more trouble by sticking to the seat.

Well, 'snice to know you can go out when you *want* to.

(*Tampico, Ill., Tornado*)

Albert Ferris recently installed some fine, new dome style electric light fixtures in his home which are beautiful and add much to the appearance. Mention of them was not made before in order that Mrs. Marshall of Moline might be surprised when she came home for the holidays.

Keeping Mrs. M. somewhat in the dark.



Everybody's Chestnut Tree

Editor's Note: Though the sign is the Chestnut Tree, no story is barred by its youth. We will gladly pay for available ones. Address all manuscripts to "The Chestnut Tree," enclosing stamped addressed envelope.

POET: Just hear those trees in the orchard sighing in the breeze!

Plumber: Huh! I guess maybe you'd be sighin' too if you was as full of green apples as them trees is.

"**MAMA,**" said small Betty, "can I have just one piece of candy?"

"Why, dear," protested her mother, "you had three when you came in."

"I know," replied Betty, "but I think one will be enough this time."

"**AND** I suppose," remarked the fair visitor in the courtroom, "that they have a record of all the divorce cases that come to trial here?"

"Oh, yes!" said her companion. "They no doubt keep a scrap book."

AN OLD German sea-captain concluded a conversation with the remark:

"Vell, I go home now, an' my wife, she shave me."

"Shave you!" exclaimed his friend. "Do you mean to tell me you let your wife shave you?"

"Let her! *Mein Gott*, I make her!"

OLD Calkins came into town one day from his up-state farm and saw an electric fan for the first time. He stared at the whirring gray phantom-like thing for some minutes; then he said:

"Marse James, dat sutny is a lively squirrel yo' got in dat 'ar cage, sah; but he's sho'ly gwine ter bus' his heart if he keeps on makin' dem resolutions so fast."

A COLORED man who had unwisely assimilated some alien chickens heard the sheriff was on the trail. Hastily he sought the agent of the railroad, asking for a ticket to the end of the line.

"The passenger train left a few minutes ago," replied the agent.

"Well," gasped the hard-breathing tourist, "jes' gimme de ticket and p'int out de track."

HE HAD had bad luck fishing and on his way home he entered the butcher shop and said to the dealer:

"Just stand over there and throw me five of the biggest of those trout!"

"Throw 'em! What for?" asked the dealer in amazement.

"So I can tell the family I caught 'em. I may be a poor fisherman, but I'm no liar."

"**WHAT** is an acute angle, Henry?" asked the teacher.

The pupil hesitated; gave up in blank despair.

"Are you dumb, Henry? Can't you tell me a thing about an acute angle?"

"Oh—one that gives you a pain to remember, I suppose," came the forced answer.

A WELL-KNOWN woman is a famous Mrs. Malaprop as regards her speech.

"And what in France," asked a friend, "did you enjoy the most, Mrs. ——?"

"Well, I think," said the lady, "it was the French pheasants singing the Mayonnaise."

AT ONE of the big vacation camps, the leaders, or "teachers" as the children call them, have to censor the letters written home by their charges. One little girl—guess her nationality—wrote to her mother:

"Five of us kids went on a hike Wensday. And what do you think? On the way back teacher treated us all to ice-cream Cohens."

"SAY, Pop, why do bill collectors annoy people so much?"

"Because so many people buy more than they can pay for, my son."

MANDY and her husband had been separated for three weeks.

"Hasn't your husband tried to get you to patch things up and be friendly again?" asked a neighbor one day.

"Man," replied Mandy, "account of havin' to patch things up all de time was de main reason I left."

"YOU are sure that this metal filing cabinet is absolutely fireproof?" asked Biggs of the new furniture salesman.

"Absolutely, sir," replied the latter. "Why, do you know, sir, that one of our filing cabinets came safe and sound out of the big Spoof Bros. fire, although everything inside of it had been burned to ashes?"

GLADYS'S father raised chickens, and Gladys understood all about setting hens. One day she was taken to see the new litter of puppies. They were curly black balls cuddled down beside a smooth tan mother.

"Are those really our Fanny's puppies?" Gladys asked.

"Yes, dear," she was told.

"Well, then," she remarked in a disgusted tone, "she couldn't have set on her own eggs."

THE negro minister was trying to impress his hearers with the shame and remorse felt by the prodigal son, and with his desire to cast away his wicked doings:

"Dis young man got to thinking about his meanness and his misery, and he tuk off his coat and frowed it away. And den he tuk off his vest and frowed dat away. And den he tuk off his shirt and frowed dat away, too. And den he come to hisself."

AN OLD-TIME negro preacher was reading and commenting upon a chapter in the Bible which dealt with genealogy. When he came to the passage "And seven sons did Milca bear," he paused and explained as follows:

"Now, bredren and sisters, dis jes' means dat dey run out o' milk at dat house—de cows had went dry, or didn't come up or somethin', and de boys went out and cotch a bar an' milked her. Dem boys could milk anythin'!"

"WHAT sort of people did you find at the summer resort?"

"Extremely old people, and their grandparents."

FIVE-YEAR-OLD Billie at the breakfast table asked for more bacon. There being very little bacon left, his father, without comment, put a piece of toast on his plate, which was accepted in silence.

Finally father said: "Well, Billie, what do you say?"

"I say I want some bacon, and when I get it I am going to say thank you," said Billie.

THE new sergeant was drilling the "awkward squad" and was not at all satisfied with their progress. Finally he said very emphatically:

"Now, men, when I say 'Halt!' put the foot that's on the ground beside the one that's in the air, and *remain motionless*."

"BEDAD, when I was courtin' Nora," sighed Pat reminiscently, as he felt the bump on his head, "I loved her so I could've ate her. An' manny's the time since then I've wished I had."

"DIDN'T you hear about it?"

"No."

"But it happened right in your neighborhood."

"I know—but my wife's been away."

THE airman was explaining the use of the parachute to a group of sightseers.

"And what would happen if the parachute failed to open after you jumped off?" asked the listener.

"Oh, that wouldn't stop me!" replied the airman. "I'd come down just the same."